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LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY

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THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE

(with Robert Eustace)

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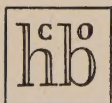
OMNIBUS

containing

WHOSE BODY?

THE UNPLEASANTNESS
AT THE BELLONA CLUB

SUSPICIOUS
CHARACTERS



HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY QUINN & BODEN COMPANY, INC., RAHWAY, N. J.

WHOSE BODY?

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*The Singular Adventure of the
Man with the Golden Pince-Nez*

To M. J.

Dear Jim:

This book is your fault. If it had not been for your brutal insistence, Lord Peter would never have staggered through to the end of this enquiry. Pray consider that he thanks you with his accustomed suavity.

Yours ever,

D. L. S.

CHAPTER I

"OH, DAMN!" SAID LORD PETER WIMSEY AT PICCADILLY Circus. "Hi, driver!"

The taxi man, irritated at receiving this appeal while negotiating the intricacies of turning into Lower Regent Street across the route of a 19 'bus, a 38-B and a bicycle, bent an unwilling ear.

"I've left the catalogue behind," said Lord Peter deprecatingly. "Uncommonly careless of me. D'you mind puttin' back to where we came from?"

"To the Savile Club, sir?"

"No—110 Piccadilly—just beyond—thank you."

"Thought you was in a hurry," said the man, overcome with a sense of injury.

"I'm afraid it's an awkward place to turn in," said Lord Peter, answering the thought rather than the words. His long, amiable face looked as if it had generated spontaneously from his top hat, as white maggots breed from Gorgonzola.

The taxi, under the severe eye of a policeman, revolved by slow jerks, with a noise like the grinding of teeth.

The block of new, perfect and expensive flats in which Lord Peter dwelt upon the second floor, stood directly opposite the Green Park, in a spot for many years occupied by the skeleton of a frustrate commercial enterprise. As Lord Peter let himself in he

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heard his man's voice in the library, uplifted in that throttled stridency peculiar to well-trained persons using the telephone.

"I believe that's his lordship just coming in again—if your Grace would kindly hold the line a moment."

"What is it, Bunter?"

"Her Grace has just called up from Denver, my lord. I was just saying your lordship had gone to the sale when I heard your lordship's latchkey."

"Thanks," said Lord Peter; "and you might find me my catalogue, would you? I think I must have left it in my bedroom, or on the desk."

He sat down to the telephone with an air of leisurely courtesy, as though it were an acquaintance dropped in for a chat.

"Hullo, Mother—that you?"

"Oh, there you are, dear," replied the voice of the Dowager Duchess. "I was afraid I'd just missed you."

"Well, you had, as a matter of fact. I'd just started off to Brocklebury's sale to pick up a book or two, but I had to come back for the catalogue. What's up?"

"Such a quaint thing," said the Duchess. "I thought I'd tell you. You know little Mr. Thipps?"

"Thipps?" said Lord Peter. "Thipps? Oh, yes, the little architect man who's doing the church roof. Yes. What about him?"

"Mrs. Throgmorton's just been in, in quite a state of mind."

"Sorry, Mother, I can't hear. Mrs. Who?"

"Throgmorton—Throgmorton—the vicar's wife."

"Oh, Throgmorton, yes?"

"Mr. Thipps rang them up this morning. It was his day to come down, you know."

"Yes?"

"He rang them up to say he couldn't. He was so upset, poor little man. He'd found a dead body in his bath."

"Sorry, Mother, I can't hear; found what, where?"

"A dead body, dear, in his bath."

"What?—no, no, we haven't finished. Please don't cut us off. Hullo! Hullo! Is that you, Mother? Hullo!—Mother!—Oh, yes—sorry, the girl was trying to cut us off. What sort of body?"

"A dead man, dear, with nothing on but a pair of pince-nez. Mrs. Throgmorton positively blushed when she was telling me. I'm afraid people do get a little narrow-minded in country vicarages."

"Well, it sounds a bit unusual. Was it anybody he knew?"

"No, dear, I don't think so, but, of course, he couldn't give her many details. She said he sounded quite distracted. He's such a respectable little man—and having the police in the house and so on, really worried him."

"Poor little Thipps! Uncommonly awkward for him. Let's see, he lives in Battersea, doesn't he?"

"Yes, dear; 59, Queen Caroline Mansions; opposite the Park. That big block just round the corner from the Hospital. I thought perhaps you'd like to run round and see him and ask if there's anything we can do. I always thought him a nice little man."

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"Oh, quite," said Lord Peter, grinning at the telephone. The Duchess was always of the greatest assistance to his hobby of criminal investigation, though she never alluded to it, and maintained a polite fiction of its non-existence.

"What time did it happen, Mother?"

"I think he found it early this morning, but, of course, he didn't think of telling the Throgmortons just at first. She came up to me just before lunch—so tiresome, I had to ask her to stay. Fortunately, I was alone. I don't mind being bored myself, but I hate having my guests bored."

"Poor old Mother! Well, thanks awfully for tellin' me. I think I'll send Bunter to the sale and toddle round to Battersea now an' try and console the poor little beast. So-long."

"Good-bye, dear."

"Bunter!"

"Yes, my lord."

"Her Grace tells me that a respectable Battersea architect has discovered a dead man in his bath."

"Indeed, my lord? That's very gratifying."

"Very, Bunter. Your choice of words is unerring. I wish Eton and Balliol had done as much for me. Have you found the catalogue?"

"Here it is, my lord."

"Thanks. I am going to Battersea at once. I want you to attend the sale for me. Don't lose time—I don't want to miss the Folio Dante* nor the de

* This is the first Florence edition, 1481, by Niccolo di Lorenzo. Lord Peter's collection of printed Dantes is worth inspection. It includes, besides

Voragine—here you are—see? ‘Golden Legend’—Wynkyn de Worde, 1493—got that?—and, I say, make a special effort for the Caxton folio of the ‘Four Sons of Aymon’—it’s the 1489 folio and unique. Look! I’ve marked the lots I want, and put my outside offer against each. Do your best for me. I shall be back to dinner.”

“Very good, my lord.”

“Take my cab and tell him to hurry. He may for you; he doesn’t like me very much. Can I,” said Lord Peter, looking at himself in the eighteenth-century mirror over the mantelpiece, “can I have the heart to fluster the flustered Thipps further—that’s very difficult to say quickly—by appearing in a top-hat and frock-coat? I think not. Ten to one he will overlook my trousers and mistake me for the undertaker. A grey suit, I fancy, neat but not gaudy, with a hat to tone, suits my other self better. Exit the amateur of first editions; new motive introduced by solo bassoon; enter Sherlock Holmes, disguised as a walking gentleman. There goes Bunter. Invaluable fellow—never offers to do his job when you’ve told him to do something else. Hope he doesn’t miss the ‘Four Sons of Aymon.’ Still, there *is* another copy of that—in the Vatican.* It might become available, you never know

the famous Aldine 8vo. of 1502, the Naples folio of 1477—“edizione rarissima,” according to Colomb. This copy has no history, and Mr. Parker’s private belief is that its present owner conveyed it away by stealth from somewhere or other. Lord Peter’s own account is that he “picked it up in a little place in the hills,” when making a walking-tour through Italy.

* Lord Peter’s wits were wool-gathering. The book is in the possession of Earl Spencer. The Brocklebury copy is incomplete, the last five signatures being altogether missing, but is unique in possessing the colophon.

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—if the Church of Rome went to pot or Switzerland invaded Italy—whereas a strange corpse doesn't turn up in a suburban bathroom more than once in a lifetime—at least, I should think not—at any rate, the number of times it's happened, *with* a pince-nez, might be counted on the fingers of one hand, I imagine. Dear me! it's a dreadful mistake to ride two hobbies at once."

He had drifted across the passage into his bedroom, and was changing with a rapidity one might not have expected from a man of his mannerisms. He selected a dark-green tie to match his socks and tied it accurately without hesitation or the slightest compression of his lips; substituted a pair of brown shoes for his black ones, slipped a monocle into a breast pocket, and took up a beautiful Malacca walking-stick with a heavy silver knob.

"That's all, I think," he murmured to himself. "Stay—I may as well have you—you may come in useful—one never knows." He added a flat silver matchbox to his equipment, glanced at his watch, and seeing that it was already a quarter to three, ran briskly downstairs, and, hailing a taxi, was carried to Battersea Park.

Mr. Alfred Thipps was a small, nervous man, whose flaxen hair was beginning to abandon the unequal struggle with destiny. One might say that his only really marked feature was a large bruise over the left eyebrow, which gave him a faintly dissipated air incongruous with the rest of his appearance. Almost in

the same breath with his first greeting, he made a self-conscious apology for it, murmuring something about having run against the dining-room door in the dark. He was touched almost to tears by Lord Peter's thoughtfulness and condescension in calling.

"I'm sure it's most kind of your lordship," he repeated for the dozenth time, rapidly blinking his weak little eyelids. "I appreciate it very deeply, very deeply, indeed, and so would Mother, only she's so deaf, I don't like to trouble you with making her understand. It's been very hard all day," he added, "with the policemen in the house and all this commotion. It's what Mother and me have never been used to, always living very retired, and it's most distressing to a man of regular habits, my lord, and reely, I'm almost thankful Mother doesn't understand, for I'm sure it would worry her terribly if she was to know about it. She was upset at first, but she's made up some idea of her own about it now, and I'm sure it's all for the best."

The old lady who sat knitting by the fire nodded grimly in response to a look from her son.

"I always said as you ought to complain about that bath, Alfred," she said suddenly, in the high, piping voice peculiar to the deaf, "and it's to be 'oped the landlord'll see about it now; not but what I think you might have managed without having the police in, but there! you always were one to make a fuss about a little thing, from chicken-pox up."

"There now," said Mr. Thipps apologetically, "you see how it is. Not but what it's just as well she's settled

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on that, because she understands we've locked up the bathroom and don't try to go in there. But it's been a terrible shock to me, sir—my lord, I should say, but there! my nerves are all to pieces. Such a thing has never 'appened—happened to me in all my born days. Such a state I was in this morning—I didn't know if I was on my head or my heels—I reely didn't, and my heart not being too strong, I hardly knew how to get out of that horrid room and telephone for the police. It's affected me, sir, it's affected me, it reely has—I couldn't touch a bit of breakfast, nor lunch neither, and what with telephoning and putting off clients and interviewing people all morning, I've hardly known what to do with myself."

"I'm sure it must have been uncommonly distressin'," said Lord Peter, sympathetically, "especially comin' like that before breakfast. Hate anything tiresome happenin' before breakfast. Takes a man at such a confounded disadvantage, what?"

"That's just it, that's just it," said Mr. Thipps, eagerly. "When I saw that dreadful thing lying there in my bath, mother-naked, too, except for a pair of eyeglasses, I assure you, my lord, it regularly turned my stomach, if you'll excuse the expression. I'm not very strong, sir, and I get that sinking feeling sometimes in the morning, and what with one thing and another I 'ad—had to send the girl for a stiff brandy, or I don't know *what* mightn't have happened. I felt so queer, though I'm anything but partial to spirits as a rule. Still, I make it a rule never to be without brandy in the house, in case of emergency, you know?"

"Very wise of you," said Lord Peter, cheerfully. "You're a very far-seein' man, Mr. Thipps. Wonderful what a little nip'll do in case of need, and the less you're used to it the more good it does you. Hope your girl is a sensible young woman, what? Nuisance to have women faintin' and shriekin' all over the place."

"Oh, Gladys is a good girl," said Mr. Thipps, "very reasonable indeed. She was shocked, of course; that's very understandable. I was shocked myself, and it wouldn't be proper in a young woman not to be shocked under the circumstances, but she is reely a helpful, energetic girl in a crisis, if you understand me. I consider myself very fortunate these days to have got a good, decent girl to do for me and Mother, even though she is a bit careless and forgetful about little things, but that's only natural. She was very sorry indeed about having left the bathroom window open, she reely was, and though I was angry at first, seeing what's come of it, it wasn't anything to speak of, not in the ordinary way, as you might say. Girls will forget things, you know, my lord, and reely she was so distressed I didn't like to say too much to her. All I said was: 'It might have been burglars,' I said, 'remember that, next time you leave a window open all night; this time it was a dead man,' I said, 'and that's unpleasant enough, but next time it might be burglars,' I said, 'and all of us murdered in our beds.' But the police-inspector—Inspector Sugg, they called him, from the Yard—he was very sharp with her, poor girl. Quite frightened her, and made her think

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he suspected her of something, though what good a body could be to her, poor girl, I can't imagine, and so I told the Inspector. He was quite rude to me, my lord—I may say I didn't like his manner at all. 'If you've got anything definite to accuse Gladys or me of, Inspector,' I said to him, 'bring it forward, that's what you have to do,' I said, 'but I've yet to learn that you're paid to be rude to a gentleman in his own 'ouse—house.' Reely," said Mr. Thipps, growing quite pink on the top of his head, "he regularly roused me, regularly roused me, my lord, and I'm a mild man as a rule."

"Sugg all over," said Lord Peter. "I know him. When he don't know what else to say, he's rude. Stands to reason you and the girl wouldn't go collectin' bodies. Who'd want to saddle himself with a body? Difficulty's usually to get rid of 'em. Have you got rid of this one yet, by the way?"

"It's still in the bathroom," said Mr. Thipps. "Inspector Sugg said nothing was to be touched till his men came in to move it. I'm expecting them at any time. If it would interest your lordship to have a look at it—"

"Thanks awfully," said Lord Peter. "I'd like to very much, if I'm not puttin' you out."

"Not at all," said Mr. Thipps. His manner as he led the way along the passage convinced Lord Peter of two things—first, that, gruesome as his exhibit was, he rejoiced in the importance it reflected upon himself and his flat, and secondly, that Inspector Sugg had forbidden him to exhibit it to anyone. The latter

supposition was confirmed by the action of Mr. Thipps, who stopped to fetch the door-key from his bedroom, saying that the police had the other, but that he made it a rule to have two keys to every door, in case of accident.

The bathroom was in no way remarkable. It was long and narrow, the window being exactly over the head of the bath. The panes were of frosted glass; the frame wide enough to admit a man's body. Lord Peter stepped rapidly across to it, opened it and looked out.

The flat was the top one of the building and situated about the middle of the block. The bathroom window looked out upon the back-yards of the flats, which were occupied by various small outbuildings, coal-holes, garages, and the like. Beyond these were the back gardens of a parallel line of houses. On the right rose the extensive edifice of St. Luke's Hospital, Battersea, with its grounds, and, connected with it by a covered way, the residence of the famous surgeon, Sir Julian Freke, who directed the surgical side of the great new hospital, and was, in addition, known in Harley Street as a distinguished neurologist with a highly individual point of view.

This information was poured into Lord Peter's ear at considerable length by Mr. Thipps, who seemed to feel that the neighbourhood of anybody so distinguished shed a kind of halo of glory over Queen Caroline Mansions.

"We had him round here himself this morning," he said, "about this horrid business. Inspector Sugg

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thought one of the young medical gentlemen at the hospital might have brought the corpse round for a joke, as you might say, they always having bodies in the dissecting-room. So Inspector Sugg went round to see Sir Julian this morning to ask if there was a body missing. He was very kind, was Sir Julian, very kind indeed, though he was at work when they got there, in the dissecting-room. He looked up the books to see that all the bodies were accounted for, and then very obligingly came round here to look at this"—he indicated the bath—"and said he was afraid he couldn't help us—there was no corpse missing from the hospital, and this one didn't answer to the description of any they'd had."

"Nor to the description of any of the patients, I hope," suggested Lord Peter casually.

At this grisly hint Mr. Thipps turned pale.

"I didn't hear Inspector Sugg inquire," he said, with some agitation. "What a very horrid thing that would be—God bless my soul, my lord, I never thought of it."

"Well, if they had missed a patient they'd probably have discovered it by now," said Lord Peter. "Let's have a look at this one."

He screwed his monocle into his eye, adding: "I see you're troubled here with the soot blowing in. Beastly nuisance, ain't it? I get it, too—spoils all my books, you know. Here, don't you trouble, if you don't care about lookin' at it."

He took from Mr. Thipps's hesitating hand the

sheet which had been flung over the bath, and turned it back.

The body which lay in the bath was that of a tall, stout man of about fifty. The hair, which was thick and black and naturally curly, had been cut and parted by a master hand, and exuded a faint violet perfume, perfectly recognisable in the close air of the bathroom. The features were thick, fleshy and strongly marked, with prominent dark eyes, and a long nose curving down to a heavy chin. The clean-shaven lips were full and sensual, and the dropped jaw showed teeth stained with tobacco. On the dead face the handsome pair of gold pince-nez mocked death with grotesque elegance; the fine gold chain curved over the naked breast. The legs lay stiffly stretched out side by side; the arms reposed close to the body; the fingers were flexed naturally. Lord Peter lifted one arm, and looked at the hand with a little frown.

"Bit of a dandy, your visitor, what?" he murmured. "Parma violet and manicure." He bent again, slipping his hand beneath the head. The absurd eye-glasses slipped off, clattering into the bath, and the noise put the last touch to Mr. Thipps's growing nervousness.

"If you'll excuse me," he murmured, "it makes me feel quite faint, it reely does."

He slipped outside, and he had no sooner done so than Lord Peter, lifting the body quickly and cautiously, turned it over and inspected it with his head on one side, bringing his monocle into play with the

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air of the late Joseph Chamberlain approving a rare orchid. He then laid the head over his arm, and bringing out the silver matchbox from his pocket, slipped it into the open mouth. Then making the noise usually written "Tut-tut," he laid the body down, picked up the mysterious pince-nez, looked at it, put it on his nose and looked through it, made the same noise again, readjusted the pince-nez upon the nose of the corpse, so as to leave no traces of interference for the irritation of Inspector Sugg; rearranged the body; returned to the window and, leaning out, reached upwards and sideways with his walking-stick, which he had somewhat incongruously brought along with him. Nothing appearing to come of these investigations, he withdrew his head, closed the window, and rejoined Mr. Thipps in the passage.

Mr. Thipps, touched by this sympathetic interest in the younger son of a duke, took the liberty, on their return to the sitting-room, of offering him a cup of tea. Lord Peter, who had strolled over to the window and was admiring the outlook on Battersea Park, was about to accept, when an ambulance came into view at the end of Prince of Wales Road. Its appearance reminded Lord Peter of an important engagement, and with a hurried "By Jove!" he took his leave of Mr. Thipps.

"My mother sent kind regards and all that," he said, shaking hands fervently; "hopes you'll soon be down at Denver again. Good-bye, Mrs. Thipps," he bawled kindly into the ear of the old lady. "Oh, no, my dear sir, please don't trouble to come down."

He was none too soon. As he stepped out of the door and turned towards the station, the ambulance drew up from the other direction, and Inspector Sugg emerged from it with two constables. The Inspector spoke to the officer on duty at the Mansions, and turned a suspicious gaze on Lord Peter's retreating back.

"Dear old Sugg," said that nobleman, fondly, "dear, dear old bird! How he does hate me, to be sure."

CHAPTER II

"EXCELLENT, BUNTER," SAID LORD PETER, SINKING with a sigh into a luxurious armchair. "I couldn't have done better myself. The thought of the Dante makes my mouth water—and the 'Four Sons of Aymon.' And you've saved me £60—that's glorious. What shall we spend it on, Bunter? Think of it—all ours, to do as we like with, for as Harold Skimpole so rightly observes, £60 saved is £60 gained, and I'd reckoned on spending it all. It's your saving, Bunter, and properly speaking, your £60. What do we want? Anything in your department? Would you like anything altered in the flat?"

"Well, my lord, as your lordship is so good"—the man-servant paused, about to pour an old brandy into a liqueur glass.

"Well, out with it, my Bunter, you imperturbable old hypocrite. It's no good talking as if you were announcing dinner—you're spilling the brandy. The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. What does that blessed darkroom of yours want now?"

"There's a Double Anastigmat with a set of supplementary lenses, my lord," said Bunter, with a note almost of religious fervour. "If it was a case of forgery now—or footprints—I could enlarge them right up on the plate. Or the wide-angled lens would

be useful. It's as though the camera had eyes at the back of its head, my lord. Look—I've got it here."

He pulled a catalogue from his pocket, and submitted it, quivering, to his employer's gaze.

Lord Peter perused the description slowly, the corners of his long mouth lifted into a faint smile.

"It's Greek to me," he said, "and £50 seems a ridiculous price for a few bits of glass. I suppose, Bunter, you'd say £750 was a bit out of the way for a dirty old book in a dead language, wouldn't you?"

"It wouldn't be my place to say so, my lord."

"No, Bunter, I pay you £200 a year to keep your thoughts to yourself. Tell me, Bunter, in these democratic days, don't you think that's unfair?"

"No, my lord."

"You don't. D'you mind telling me frankly why you don't think it unfair?"

"Frankly, my lord, your lordship is paid a nobleman's income to take Lady Worthington in to dinner and refrain from exercising your lordship's undoubted powers of repartee."

Lord Peter considered this.

"That's your idea, is it, Bunter? Noblesse oblige—for a consideration. I daresay you're right. Then you're better off than I am, because I'd have to behave myself to Lady Worthington if I hadn't a penny. Bunter, if I sacked you here and now, would you tell me what you think of me?"

"No, my lord."

"You'd have a perfect right to, my Bunter, and if I sacked you on top of drinking the kind of coffee

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you make, I'd deserve everything you could say of me. You're a demon for coffee, Bunter—I don't want to know how you do it, because I believe it to be witchcraft, and I don't want to burn eternally. You can buy your cross-eyed lens."

"Thank you, my lord."

"Have you finished in the dining-room?"

"Not quite, my lord."

"Well, come back when you have. I have many things to tell you. Hullo! who's that?"

The doorbell had rung sharply.

"Unless it's anybody interestin' I'm not at home."

"Very good, my lord."

Lord Peter's library was one of the most delightful bachelor rooms in London. Its scheme was black and primrose; its walls were lined with rare editions, and its chairs and Chesterfield sofa suggested the embraces of the houris. In one corner stood a black baby grand, a wood fire leaped on a wide old-fashioned hearth, and the Sèvres vases on the chimneypiece were filled with ruddy and gold chrysanthemums. To the eyes of the young man who was ushered in from the raw November fog it seemed not only rare and unattainable, but friendly and familiar, like a colourful and gilded paradise in a mediaeval painting.

"Mr. Parker, my lord."

Lord Peter jumped up with genuine eagerness.

"My dear man, I'm delighted to see you. What a beastly foggy night, ain't it? Bunter, some more of that admirable coffee and another glass and the cigars. Parker, I hope you're full of crime—nothing less than

arson or murder will do for us tonight. 'On such a night as this—' Bunter and I were just sitting down to carouse. I've got a Dante, and a Caxton folio that is practically unique, at Sir Ralph Brocklebury's sale. Bunter, who did the bargaining, is going to have a lens which does all kinds of wonderful things with its eyes shut, and

We both have got a body in a bath,
We both have got a body in a bath—
For in spite of all temptations
To go in for cheap sensations
We insist upon a body in a bath—

Nothing less will do for us, Parker. It's mine at present, but we're going shares in it. Property of the firm. Won't you join us? You really must put *something* in the jack-pot. Perhaps you have a body. Oh, do have a body. Every body welcome.

Gin a body meet a body
Hauled before the beak,
Gin a body jolly well knows who murdered a
body and that old Sugg is on the wrong tack,
Need a body speak?

Not a bit of it. He tips a glassy wink to yours truly and yours truly reads the truth."

"Ah," said Parker, "I knew you'd been round to Queen Caroline Mansions. So've I, and met Sugg, and he told me he'd seen you. He was cross, too. Unwarrantable interference, he calls it."

"I knew he would," said Lord Peter. "I love taking a rise out of dear old Sugg, he's always so rude. I see

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by the *Star* that he has excelled himself by taking the girl, Gladys What's-her-name, into custody. Sugg of the evening, beautiful Sugg! But what were *you* doing there?"

"To tell you the truth," said Parker, "I went round to see if the Semitic-looking stranger in Mr. Thipps's bath was by any extraordinary chance Sir Reuben Levy. But he isn't."

"Sir Reuben Levy? Wait a minute, I saw something about that. I know! A headline: 'Mysterious disappearance of famous financier.' What's it all about? I didn't read it carefully."

"Well, it's a bit odd, though I daresay it's nothing really—old chap may have cleared for some reason best known to himself. It only happened this morning, and nobody would have thought anything about it, only it happened to be the day on which he had arranged to attend a most important financial meeting and do some deal involving millions—I haven't got all the details. But I know he's got enemies who'd just as soon the deal didn't come off, so when I got wind of this fellow in the bath, I buzzed round to have a look at him. It didn't seem likely, of course, but unlikelier things do happen in our profession. The funny thing is, old Sugg had got bitten with the idea it *is* him, and is wildly telegraphing to Lady Levy to come and identify him. But as a matter of fact, the man in the bath is no more Sir Reuben Levy than Adolf Beck, poor devil, was John Smith. Oddly enough, though, he would be really extraordinarily like Sir Reuben if he had a beard, and as Lady Levy

is abroad with the family, somebody may say it's him, and Sugg will build up a lovely theory, like the Tower of Babel, and destined so to perish."

"Sugg's a beautiful, braying ass," said Lord Peter. "He's like a detective in a novel. Well, I don't know anything about Levy, but I've seen the body, and I should say the idea was preposterous upon the face of it. What do you think of the brandy?"

"Unbelievable, Wimsey—sort of thing makes one believe in heaven. But I want your yarn."

"D'you mind if Bunter hears it, too? Invaluable man, Bunter—amazin' fellow with a camera. And the odd thing is, he's always on the spot when I want my bath or my boots. I don't know when he develops things—I believe he does 'em in his sleep. Bunter!"

"Yes, my lord."

"Stop fiddling about in there, and get yourself the proper things to drink and join the merry throng."

"Certainly, my lord."

"Mr. Parker has a new trick: The Vanishing Financier. Absolutely no deception. Hey, presto, pass! and where is he? Will some gentleman from the audience kindly step upon the platform and inspect the cabinet? Thank you, sir. The quickness of the 'and deceives the heye."

"I'm afraid mine isn't much of a story," said Parker. "It's just one of those simple things that offer no handle. Sir Reuben Levy dined last night with three friends at the Ritz. After dinner the friends went to the theatre. He refused to go with them on account of an appointment. I haven't yet been able

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to trace the appointment, but anyhow, he returned home to his house—9a, Park Lane—at twelve o'clock."

"Who saw him?"

"The cook, who had just gone up to bed, saw him on the doorstep, and heard him let himself in. He walked upstairs, leaving his greatcoat on the hall peg and his umbrella in the stand—you remember how it rained last night. He undressed and went to bed. Next morning he wasn't there. That's all," said Parker abruptly, with a wave of the hand.

"It isn't all, it isn't all. Daddy, go on, that's not *half* a story," pleaded Lord Peter.

"But it *is* all. When his man came to call him he wasn't there. The bed had been slept in. His pyjamas and all his clothes were there, the only odd thing being that they were thrown rather untidily on the ottoman at the foot of the bed, instead of being neatly folded on a chair, as is Sir Reuben's custom—looking as though he had been rather agitated or unwell. No clean clothes were missing, no suit, no boots—nothing. The boots he had worn were in his dressing-room as usual. He had washed and cleaned his teeth and done all the usual things. The housemaid was down cleaning the hall at half-past six, and can swear that nobody came in or out after that. So one is forced to suppose that a respectable middle-aged Hebrew financier either went mad between twelve and six a.m. and walked quietly out of the house in his birthday suit on a November night, or else was spirited away like the lady in the 'Ingoldsby Legends,'

body and bones, leaving only a heap of crumpled clothes behind him."

"Was the front door bolted?"

"That's the sort of question you *would* ask, straight off; it took me an hour to think of it. No; contrary to custom, there was only the Yale lock on the door. On the other hand, some of the maids had been given leave to go to the theatre, and Sir Reuben may quite conceivably have left the door open under the impression they had not come in. Such a thing has happened before."

"And that's really all?"

"Really all. Except for one very trifling circumstance."

"I love trifling circumstances," said Lord Peter, with childish delight; "so many men have been hanged by trifling circumstances. What was it?"

"Sir Reuben and Lady Levy, who are a most devoted couple, always share the same room. Lady Levy, as I said before, is in Mentonne at the moment for her health. In her absence, Sir Reuben sleeps in the double bed as usual, and invariably on his own side—the outside—of the bed. Last night he put the two pillows together and slept in the middle, or, if anything, rather closer to the wall than otherwise. The housemaid, who is a most intelligent girl, noticed this when she went up to make the bed, and, with really admirable detective instinct, refused to touch the bed or let anybody else touch it, though it wasn't till later that they actually sent for the police."

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"Was nobody in the house but Sir Reuben and the servants?"

"No; Lady Levy was away with her daughter and her maid. The valet, cook, parlourmaid, housemaid and kitchenmaid were the only people in the house, and naturally wasted an hour or two squawking and gossiping. I got there about ten."

"What have you been doing since?"

"Trying to get on the track of Sir Reuben's appointment last night, since, with the exception of the cook, his 'appointer' was the last person who saw him before his disappearance. There may be some quite simple explanation, though I'm dashed if I can think of one for the moment. Hang it all, a man doesn't come in and go to bed and walk away again 'mid nodings on' in the middle of the night."

"He may have been disguised."

"I thought of that—in fact, it seems the only possible explanation. But it's deuced odd, Wimsey. An important city man, on the eve of an important transaction, without a word of warning to anybody, slips off in the middle of the night, disguised down to his skin, leaving behind his watch, purse, cheque-book, and—most mysterious and important of all—his spectacles, without which he can't see a step, as he is extremely short-sighted. He—"

"That *is* important," interrupted Wimsey. "You are sure he didn't take a second pair?"

"His man vouches for it that he had only two pairs, one of which was found on his dressing-table, and the other in the drawer where it is always kept."

Lord Peter whistled.

"You've got me there, Parker. Even if he'd gone out to commit suicide he'd have taken those."

"So you'd think—or the suicide would have happened the first time he started to cross the road. However, I didn't overlook the possibility. I've got particulars of all today's street accidents, and I can lay my hand on my heart and say that none of them is Sir Reuben. Besides, he took his latchkey with him, which looks as though he'd meant to come back."

"Have you seen the men he dined with?"

"I found two of them at the club. They said that he seemed in the best of health and spirits, spoke of looking forward to joining Lady Levy later on—perhaps at Christmas—and referred with great satisfaction to this morning's business transaction, in which one of them—a man called Anderson of Wyndham's—was himself concerned."

"Then up till about nine o'clock, anyhow, he had no apparent intention or expectation of disappearing."

"None—unless he was a most consummate actor. Whatever happened to change his mind must have happened either at the mysterious appointment which he kept after dinner, or while he was in bed between midnight and 5.30 a.m."

"Well, Bunter," said Lord Peter, "what do you make of it?"

"Not in my department, my lord. Except that it is odd that a gentleman who was too flurried or unwell to fold his clothes as usual should remember to

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clean his teeth and put his boots out. Those are two things that quite frequently get overlooked, my lord."

"If you mean anything personal, Bunter," said Lord Peter, "I can only say that I think the speech an unworthy one. It's a sweet little problem, Parker mine. Look here, I don't want to butt in, but I should dearly love to see that bedroom tomorrow. 'Tis not that I mistrust thee, dear, but I should uncommonly like to see it. Say me not nay—take another drop of brandy and a Villar Villar, but say not, say not nay!"

"Of course you can come and see it—you'll probably find lots of things I've overlooked," said the other, equably, accepting the proffered hospitality.

"Parker, acushla, you're an honour to Scotland Yard. I look at you, and Sugg appears a myth, a fable, an idiot-boy, spawned in a moonlight hour by some fantastic poet's brain. Sugg is too perfect to be possible. What does he make of the body, by the way?"

"Sugg says," replied Parker, with precision, "that the body died from a blow on the back of the neck. The doctor told him that. He says it's been dead a day or two. The doctor told him that, too. He says it's the body of a well-to-do Hebrew of about fifty. Anybody could have told him that. He says it's ridiculous to suppose it came in through the window without anybody knowing anything about it. He says it probably walked in through the front door and was murdered by the household. He's arrested the girl because she's short and frail-looking and quite unequal to downing a tall and sturdy Semite with a

poker. He'd arrest Thipps, only Thipps was away in Manchester all yesterday and the day before and didn't come back till late last night—in fact, he wanted to arrest him till I reminded him that if the body had been a day or two dead, little Thipps couldn't have done him in at 10.30 last night. But he'll arrest him tomorrow as an accessory—and the old lady with the knitting, too, I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, I'm glad the little man has so much of an alibi," said Lord Peter, "though if you're only glueing your faith to cadaveric lividity, rigidity, and all the other quiddities, you must be prepared to have some sceptical beast of a prosecuting counsel walk slap-bang through the medical evidence. Remember Impey Biggs defending in that Chelsea tea-shop affair? Six bloomin' medicos contradictin' each other in the box, an' old Impey elocutin' abnormal cases from Glaister and Dixon Mann till the eyes of the jury reeled in their heads! 'Are you prepared to swear, Dr. Thingumtight, that the onset of rigor mortis indicates the hour of death without the possibility of error?' 'So far as my experience goes, in the majority of cases,' says the doctor, all stiff. 'Ah!' says Biggs, 'but this is a Court of Justice, Doctor, not a Parliamentary election. We can't get on without a minority report. The law, Dr. Thingumtight, respects the rights of the minority, alive or dead.' Some ass laughs, and old Biggs sticks his chest out and gets impressive. 'Gentlemen, this is no laughing matter. My client—an upright and honourable gentleman—is being tried for his life—for his life, gentlemen—and it is the

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business of the prosecution to show his guilt—if they can—without a shadow of doubt. Now, Dr. Thingumtigh, I ask you again, can you solemnly swear, without the least shadow of doubt,—probable, possible shadow of doubt—that this unhappy woman met her death neither sooner nor later than Thursday evening? A probable opinion? Gentlemen, we are not Jesuits, we are straightforward Englishmen. You cannot ask a British-born jury to convict any man on the authority of a probable opinion.’ Hum of applause.”

“Biggs’s man was guilty all the same,” said Parker.

“Of course he was. But he was acquitted all the same, an’ what you’ve just said is libel.” Wimsey walked over to the bookshelf and took down a volume of Medical Jurisprudence. “‘Rigor mortis—can only be stated in a very general way—many factors determine the result.’ Cautious brute. ‘On the average, however, stiffening will have begun—neck and jaw—5 to 6 hours after death’—m’m—‘in all likelihood have passed off in the bulk of cases by the end of 36 hours. Under certain circumstances, however, it may appear unusually early, or be retarded unusually long!’ Helpful, ain’t it, Parker? ‘Brown-Séquard states . . . 3½ minutes after death. . . . In certain cases not until lapse of 16 hours after death . . . present as long as 21 days thereafter.’ Lord! ‘Modifying factors—age—muscular state—or febrile diseases—or where temperature of environment is high’—and so on and so on—any bloomin’ thing. Never mind. You can run the argument for what it’s worth

to Sugg. *He* won't know any better." He tossed the book away. "Come back to facts. What did *you* make of the body?"

"Well," said the detective, "not very much—I was puzzled—frankly. I should say he had been a rich man, but self-made, and that his good fortune had come to him fairly recently."

"Ah, you noticed the calluses on the hands—I thought you wouldn't miss that."

"Both his feet were badly blistered—he had been wearing tight shoes."

"Walking a long way in them, too," said Lord Peter, "to get such blisters as that. Didn't that strike you as odd, in a person evidently well off?"

"Well, I don't know. The blisters were two or three days old. He might have got stuck in the suburbs one night, perhaps—last train gone and no taxi—and had to walk home."

"Possibly."

"There were some little red marks all over his back and one leg I couldn't quite account for."

"I saw them."

"What did you make of them?"

"I'll tell you afterwards. Go on."

"He was very long-sighted—oddly long-sighted for a man in the prime of life; the glasses were like a very old man's. By the way, they had a very beautiful and remarkable chain of flat links chased with a pattern. It struck me he might be traced through it."

"I've just put an advertisement in the *Times* about it," said Lord Peter. "Go on."

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"He had had the glasses some time—they had been mended twice."

"Beautiful, Parker, beautiful. Did you realize the importance of that?"

"Not specially, I'm afraid—why?"

"Never mind—go on."

"He was probably a sullen, ill-tempered man—his nails were filed down to the quick as though he habitually bit them, and his fingers were bitten as well. He smoked quantities of cigarettes without a holder. He was particular about his personal appearance."

"Did you examine the room at all? I didn't get a chance."

"I couldn't find much in the way of footprints. Sugg & Co. had tramped all over the place, to say nothing of little Thipps and the maid, but I noticed a very indefinite patch just behind the head of the bath, as though something damp might have stood there. You could hardly call it a print."

"It rained hard all last night, of course."

"Yes; did you notice that the soot on the window-sill was vaguely marked?"

"I did," said Wimsey, "and I examined it hard with this little fellow, but I could make nothing of it except that something or other had rested on the sill." He drew out his monocle and handed it to Parker.

"My word, that's a powerful lens."

"It is," said Wimsey, "and jolly useful when you want to take a good squint at somethin' and look like

a bally fool all the time. Only it don't do to wear it permanently—if people see you full-face they say: 'Dear me! how weak the sight of that eye must be!' Still, it's useful."

"Sugg and I explored the ground at the back of the building," went on Parker, "but there wasn't a trace."

"That's interestin'. Did you try the roof?"

"No."

"We'll go over it tomorrow. The gutter's only a couple of feet off the top of the window. I measured it with my stick—the gentleman-scout's vademecum, I call it—it's marked off in inches. Uncommonly handy companion at times. There's a sword inside and a compass in the head. Got it made specially. Anything more?"

"Afraid not. Let's hear your version, Wimsey."

"Well, I think you've got most of the points. There are just one or two little contradictions. For instance, here's a man wears expensive gold-rimmed pince-nez and has had them long enough to be mended twice. Yet his teeth are not merely discoloured, but badly decayed and look as if he'd never cleaned them in his life. There are four molars missing on one side and three on the other and one front tooth broken right across. He's a man careful of his personal appearance, as witness his hair and his hands. What do you say to that?"

"Oh, these self-made men of low origin don't think much about teeth, and are terrified of dentists."

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"True; but one of the molars has a broken edge so rough that it had made a sore place on the tongue. Nothing's more painful. D'you mean to tell me a man would put up with that if he could afford to get the tooth filed?"

"Well, people are queer. I've known servants endure agonies rather than step over a dentist's door-mat. How did you see that, Wimsey?"

"Had a look inside; electric torch," said Lord Peter. "Handy little gadget. Looks like a matchbox. Well—I daresay it's all right, but I just draw your attention to it. Second point: Gentleman with hair smellin' of Parma violet and manicured hands and all the rest of it, never washes the inside of his ears. Full of wax. Nasty."

"You've got me there, Wimsey; I never noticed it. Still—old bad habits die hard."

"Right oh! Put it down at that. Third point: Gentleman with the manicure and the brilliantine and all the rest of it suffers from fleas."

"By Jove, you're right! Flea-bites. It never occurred to me."

"No doubt about it, old son. The marks were faint and old, but unmistakable."

"Of course, now you mention it. Still, that might happen to anybody. I loosed a whopper in the best hotel in Lincoln the week before last. I hope it bit the next occupier!"

"Oh, all these things *might* happen to anybody—separately. Fourth point: Gentleman who uses Parma

violet for his hair, etc., etc., washes his body in strong carbolic soap—so strong that the smell hangs about twenty-four hours later.”

“Carbolic to get rid of the fleas.”

“I will say for you, Parker, you’ve an answer for everything. Fifth point: Carefully got-up gentleman, with manicured, though masticated, finger-nails, has filthy black toe-nails which look as if they hadn’t been cut for years.”

“All of a piece with habits as indicated.”

“Yes, I know, but such habits! Now, sixth and last point: This gentleman with the intermittently gentlemanly habits arrives in the middle of a pouring wet night, and apparently through the window, when he has already been twenty-four hours dead, and lies down quietly in Mr. Thipps’s bath, unseasonably dressed in a pair of pince-nez. Not a hair on his head is ruffled—the hair has been cut so recently that there are quite a number of little short hairs stuck on his neck and the sides of the bath—and he has shaved so recently that there is a line of dried soap on his cheek—”

“Wimsey!”

“Wait a minute—and *dried soap in his mouth.*”

Bunter got up and appeared suddenly at the detective’s elbow, the respectful man-servant all over.

“A little more brandy, sir?” he murmured.

“Wimsey,” said Parker, “you are making me feel cold all over.” He emptied his glass—stared at it as though he were surprised to find it empty, set it

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down, got up, walked across to the bookcase, turned round, stood with his back against it and said:

"Look here, Wimsey—you've been reading detective stories; you're talking nonsense."

"No, I ain't," said Lord Peter, sleepily, "uncommon good incident for a detective story, though, what? Bunter, we'll write one, and you shall illustrate it with photographs."

"Soap in his— Rubbish!" said Parker. "It was something else—some discoloration—"

"No," said Lord Peter, "there were hairs as well. Bristly ones. He had a beard."

He took his watch from his pocket, and drew out a couple of longish, stiff hairs, which he had imprisoned between the inner and the outer case.

Parker turned them over once or twice in his fingers, looked at them close to the light, examined them with a lens, handed them to the impassible Bunter, and said:

"Do you mean to tell me, Wimsey, that any man alive would"—he laughed harshly—"shave off his beard with his mouth open, and then go and get killed with his mouth full of hairs? You're mad."

"I don't tell you so," said Wimsey. "You policemen are all alike—only one idea in your skulls. Blest if I can make out why you're ever appointed. He was shaved after he was dead. Pretty, ain't it? Uncommonly jolly little job for the barber, what? Here, sit down, man, and don't be an ass, stumpin' about the room like that. Worse things happen in war. This is

only a blinkin' old shillin' shocker. But I'll tell you what, Parker, we're up against a criminal—*the* criminal—the real artist and blighter with imagination—real, artistic, finished stuff. I'm enjoyin' this, Parker."

CHAPTER III

LORD PETER FINISHED A SCARLATTI SONATA, AND SAT looking thoughtfully at his own hands. The fingers were long and muscular, with wide, flat joints and square tips. When he was playing, his rather hard grey eyes softened, and his long, indeterminate mouth hardened in compensation. At no other time had he any pretensions to good looks, and at all times he was spoilt by a long, narrow chin, and a long, receding forehead, accentuated by the brushed-back sleekness of his tow-coloured hair. Labour papers, softening down the chin, caricatured him as a typical aristocrat.

"That's a wonderful instrument," said Parker.

"It ain't so bad," said Lord Peter, "but Scarlatti wants a harpsichord. Piano's too modern—all thrills and overtones. No good for our job, Parker. Have you come to any conclusion?"

"The man in the bath," said Parker, methodically, "was *not* a well-off man careful of his personal appearance. He was a labouring man, unemployed, but who had only recently lost his employment. He had been tramping about looking for a job when he met with his end. Somebody killed him and washed him and scented him and shaved him in order to disguise him, and put him into Thipps's bath without leaving a trace. Conclusion: the murderer was a powerful

man, since he killed him with a single blow on the neck, a man of cool head and masterly intellect, since he did all that ghastly business without leaving a mark, a man of wealth and refinement, since he had all the apparatus of an elegant toilet handy, and a man of bizarre, and almost perverted imagination, as is shown in the two horrible touches of putting the body in the bath and of adorning it with a pair of pince-nez."

"He is a poet of crime," said Wimsey. "By the way, your difficulty about the pince-nez is cleared up. Obviously, the pince-nez never belonged to the body."

"That only makes a fresh puzzle. One can't suppose the murderer left them in that obliging manner as a clue to his own identity."

"We can hardly suppose that; I'm afraid this man possessed what most criminals lack—a sense of humour."

"Rather macabre humour."

"True. But a man who can afford to be humorous at all in such circumstances is a terrible fellow. I wonder what he did with the body between the murder and depositing it chez Thipps. Then there are more questions. How did he get it there? And why? Was it brought in at the door, as Sugg of our heart suggests? or through the window, as we think, on the not very adequate testimony of a smudge on the window-sill? Had the murderer accomplices? Is little Thipps really in it, or the girl? It don't do to put the notion out of court merely because Sugg inclines to

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it. Even idiots occasionally speak the truth accidentally. If not, why was Thipps selected for such an abominable practical joke? Has anybody got a grudge against Thipps? Who are the people in the other flats? We must find out that. Does Thipps play the piano at midnight over their heads or damage the reputation of the staircase by bringing home dubiously respectable ladies? Are there unsuccessful architects thirsting for his blood? Damn it all, Parker, there must be a motive somewhere. Can't have a crime without a motive, you know."

"A madman—" suggested Parker, doubtfully.

"With a deuced lot of method in his madness. He hasn't made a mistake—not one, unless leaving hairs in the corpse's mouth can be called a mistake. Well, anyhow, it's not Levy—you're right there. I say, old thing, neither your man nor mine has left much clue to go upon, has he? And there don't seem to be any motives knockin' about, either. And we seem to be two suits of clothes short in last night's work. Sir Reuben makes tracks without so much as a fig-leaf, and a mysterious individual turns up with a pince-nez, which is quite useless for purposes of decency. Dash it all! If only I had some good excuse for takin' up this body case officially—"

The telephone bell rang. The silent Bunter, whom the other two had almost forgotten, padded across to it.

"It's an elderly lady, my lord," he said. "I think she's deaf—I can't make her hear anything, but she's asking for your lordship."

Lord Peter seized the receiver, and yelled into it a "Hullo!" that might have cracked the vulcanite. He listened for some minutes with an incredulous smile, which gradually broadened into a grin of delight. At length he screamed: "All right! all right!" several times, and rang off.

"By Jove!" he announced, beaming, "sportin' old bird! It's old Mrs. Thipps. Deaf as a post. Never used the 'phone before. But determined. Perfect Napoleon. The incomparable Sugg has made a discovery and arrested little Thipps. Old lady abandoned in the flat. Thipps's last shriek to her: 'Tell Lord Peter Wimsey.' Old girl undaunted. Wrestles with telephone book. Wakes up the people at the exchange. Won't take no for an answer (not bein' able to hear it), gets through, says: 'Will I do what I can?' Says she would feel safe in the hands of a real gentleman. Oh, Parker, Parker! I could kiss her, I reely could, as Thipps says. I'll write to her instead—no, hang it, Parker, we'll go round. Bunter, get your infernal machine and the magnesium. I say, we'll all go into partnership—pool the two cases and work 'em out together. You shall see my body tonight, Parker, and I'll look for your wandering Jew tomorrow. I feel so happy, I shall explode. O Sugg, Sugg, how art thou suggified! Bunter, my shoes. I say, Parker, I suppose yours are rubber-soled. Not? Tut, tut, you mustn't go out like that. We'll lend you a pair. Gloves? Here. My stick, my torch, the lampblack, the forceps, knife, pill-boxes—all complete?"

"Certainly, my lord."

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"Oh, Bunter, don't look so offended. I mean no harm. I believe in you, I trust you—what money have I got? That'll do. I knew a man once, Parker, who let a world-famous poisoner slip through his fingers because the machine on the Underground took nothing but pennies. There was a queue at the booking office and the man at the barrier stopped him, and while they were arguing about accepting a five-pound-note (which was all he had) for a two-penny ride to Baker Street, the criminal had sprung into a Circle train, and was next heard of in Constantinople, disguised as an elderly Church of England clergyman touring with his niece. Are we all ready? Go!"

They stepped out, Bunter carefully switching off the lights behind them.

As they emerged into the gloom and gleam of Piccadilly, Wimsey stopped short with a little exclamation.

"Wait a second," he said. "I've thought of something. If Sugg's there he'll make trouble. I must short-circuit him."

He ran back, and the other two men employed the few minutes of his absence in capturing a taxi.

Inspector Sugg and a subordinate Cerberus were on guard at 59, Queen Caroline Mansions, and showed no disposition to admit unofficial inquirers. Parker, indeed, they could not easily turn away, but Lord Peter found himself confronted with a surly manner and what Lord Beaconsfield described as a

masterly inactivity. It was in vain that Lord Peter pleaded that he had been retained by Mrs. Thipps on behalf of her son.

"Retained!" said Inspector Sugg, with a snort. "*She'll* be retained if she doesn't look out. Shouldn't wonder if she wasn't in it herself, only she's so deaf, she's no good for anything at all."

"Look here, Inspector," said Lord Peter, "what's the use of bein' so bally obstructive? You'd much better let me in—you know I'll get there in the end. Dash it all, it's not as if I was takin' the bread out of your children's mouths. Nobody paid me for finding Lord Attenbury's emeralds for you."

"It's my duty to keep out the public," said Inspector Sugg, morosely, "and it's going to stay out."

"I never said anything about your keeping out of the public," said Lord Peter, easily, sitting down on the staircase to thrash the matter out comfortably, "though I've no doubt pussyfoot's a good thing, on principle, if not exaggerated. The golden mean, Sugg, as Aristotle says, keeps you from bein' a golden ass. Ever been a golden ass, Sugg? I have. It would take a whole rose-garden to cure me, Sugg—

"'You are my garden of beautiful roses,
My own rose, my one rose, that's you!'"

"I'm not going to stay any longer talking to you," said the harassed Sugg; "it's bad enough—Hullo, drat that telephone. Here, Cawthorn, go and see what it is, if that old catamaran will let you into the room. Shutting herself up there and screaming," said the

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Inspector, "it's enough to make a man give up crime and take to hedging and ditching."

The constable came back:

"It's from the Yard, sir," he said, coughing apologetically; "the Chief says every facility is to be given to Lord Peter Wimsey, sir. Um!" He stood apart non-committally, glazing his eyes.

"Five aces," said Lord Peter, cheerfully. "The Chief's a dear friend of my mother's. No go, Sugg, it's no good buckin'; you've got a full house. I'm goin' to make it a bit fuller."

He walked in with his followers.

The body had been removed a few hours previously, and when the bathroom and the whole flat had been explored by the naked eye and the camera of the competent Bunter, it became evident that the real problem of the household was old Mrs. Thipps. Her son and servant had both been removed, and it appeared that they had no friends in town, beyond a few business acquaintances of Thipps's, whose very addresses the old lady did not know. The other flats in the building were occupied respectively by a family of seven, at present departed to winter abroad, an elderly Indian colonel of ferocious manners, who lived alone with an Indian man-servant, and a highly respectable family on the third floor, whom the disturbance over their heads had outraged to the last degree. The husband, indeed, when appealed to by Lord Peter, showed a little human weakness, but Mrs. Appledore, appearing suddenly in a warm dressing-

gown, extricated him from the difficulties into which he was carelessly wandering.

"I am sorry," she said, "I'm afraid we can't interfere in any way. This is a very unpleasant business, Mr.— I'm afraid I didn't catch your name, and we have always found it better not to be mixed up with the police. Of course, *if* the Thippses are innocent, and I am sure I hope they are, it is very unfortunate for them, but I must say that the circumstances seem to me most suspicious, and to Theophilus too, and I should not like to have it said that we had assisted murderers. We might even be supposed to be accessories. Of course you are young, Mr.—"

"This is Lord Peter Wimsey, my dear," said Theophilus mildly.

She was unimpressed.

"Ah, yes," she said, "I believe you are distantly related to my late cousin, the Bishop of Carisbrooke. Poor man! He was always being taken in by impostors; he died without ever learning any better. I imagine you take after him, Lord Peter."

"I doubt it," said Lord Peter. "So far as I know he is only a connection, though it's a wise child that knows its own father. I congratulate you, dear lady, on takin' after the other side of the family. You'll forgive my buttin' in upon you like this in the middle of the night, though, as you say, it's all in the family, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, and for permittin' me to admire that awfully fetchin' thing you've got on. Now, don't you worry, Mr.

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Appledore. I'm thinkin' the best thing I can do is to trundle the old lady down to my mother and take her out of your way, otherwise you might be findin' your Christian feelin's gettin' the better of you some fine day, and there's nothin' like Christian feelin's for upsettin' a man's domestic comfort. Good-night, sir—good-night, dear lady—it's simply rippin' of you to let me drop in like this."

"Well!" said Mrs. Appledore, as the door closed behind him.

And—

"I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled,"

said Lord Peter, "and taught me to be bestially impertinent when I choose. Cat!"

Two a.m. saw Lord Peter Wimsey arrive in a friend's car at the Dower House, Denver Castle, in company with a deaf and aged lady and an antique portmanteau.

"It's very nice to see you, dear," said the Dowager Duchess, placidly. She was a small, plump woman, with perfectly white hair and exquisite hands. In feature she was as unlike her second son as she was like him in character; her black eyes twinkled cheerfully, and her manners and movements were marked with a neat and rapid decision. She wore a charming wrap from Liberty's, and sat watching Lord Peter eat cold beef and cheese as though his arrival in such incongruous circumstances and company were the

most ordinary event possible, which with him, indeed, it was.

"Have you got the old lady to bed?" asked Lord Peter.

"Oh, yes, dear. Such a striking old person, isn't she? And very courageous. She tells me she has never been in a motor-car before. But she thinks you a very nice lad, dear—that careful of her, you remind her of her own son. Poor little Mr. Thipps—whatever made your friend the inspector think he could have murdered anybody?"

"My friend the inspector—no, no more, thank you, Mother—is determined to prove that the intrusive person in Thipps's bath is Sir Reuben Levy, who disappeared mysteriously from his house last night. His line of reasoning is: We've lost a middle-aged gentleman without any clothes on in Park Lane; we've found a middle-aged gentleman without any clothes on in Battersea. Therefore they're one and the same person, Q.E.D., and put little Thipps in quod."

"You're very elliptical, dear," said the Duchess, mildly. "Why should Mr. Thipps be arrested even if they are the same?"

"Sugg must arrest somebody," said Lord Peter, "but there is one odd little bit of evidence come out which goes a long way to support Sugg's theory, only that I know it to be no go by the evidence of my own eyes. Last night at about 9.15 a young woman was strollin' up the Battersea Park Road for purposes best known to herself, when she saw a gentleman in a fur coat and top-hat saunterin' along under an

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umbrella, lookin' at the names of all the streets. He looked a bit out of place, so, not bein' a shy girl, you see, she walked up to him, and said: 'Good-evening.' 'Can you tell me, please,' says the mysterious stranger, 'whether this street leads into Prince of Wales Road?' She said it did, and further asked him in a jocular manner what he was doing with himself and all the rest of it, only she wasn't altogether so explicit about that part of the conversation, because she was unburdenin' her heart to Sugg, d'you see, and he's paid by a grateful country to have very pure, high-minded ideals, what? Anyway, the old boy said he couldn't attend to her just then as he had an appointment. 'I've got to go and see a man, my dear,' was how she said he put it, and he walked on up Alexandra Avenue towards Prince of Wales Road. She was starin' after him, still rather surprised, when she was joined by a friend of hers, who said: 'It's no good wasting your time with him—that's Levy—I knew him when I lived in the West End, and the girls used to call him Peagreen Incorruptible'—friend's name suppressed, owing to implications of story, but girl vouches for what was said. She thought no more about it till the milkman brought news this morning of the excitement at Queen Caroline Mansions; then she went round, though not likin' the police as a rule, and asked the man there whether the dead gentleman had a beard and glasses. Told he had glasses but no beard, she incautiously said: 'Oh, then, it isn't him,' and the man said: 'Isn't who?' and collared her.

That's her story. Sugg's delighted, of course, and quodded Thipps on the strength of it."

"Dear me," said the Duchess, "I hope the poor girl won't get into trouble."

"Shouldn't think so," said Lord Peter. "Thipps is the one that's going to get it in the neck. Besides, he's done a silly thing. I got that out of Sugg, too, though he was sittin' tight on the information. Seems Thipps got into a confusion about the train he took back from Manchester. Said first he got home at 10.30. Then they pumped Gladys Horrocks, who let out he wasn't back till after 11.45. Then Thipps, bein' asked to explain the discrepancy, stammers and bungles and says, first, that he missed the train. Then Sugg makes inquiries at St. Pancras and discovers that he left a bag in the cloakroom there at ten. Thipps, again asked to explain, stammers worse an' says he walked about for a few hours—met a friend—can't say who—didn't meet a friend—can't say what he did with his time—can't explain why he didn't go back for his bag—can't say what time he *did* get in—can't explain how he got a bruise on his forehead. In fact, can't explain himself at all. Gladys Horrocks interrogated again. Says, this time, Thipps came in at 10.30. Then admits she didn't hear him come in. Can't say why she didn't hear him come in. Can't say why she said first of all that she *did* hear him. Bursts into tears. Contradicts herself. Everybody's suspicion roused. Quod 'em both."

"As you put it, dear," said the Duchess, "it all sounds very confusing, and not quite respectable.

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Poor little Mr. Thipps would be terribly upset by anything that wasn't respectable."

"I wonder what he did with himself," said Lord Peter thoughtfully. "I really don't think he was committing a murder. Besides, I believe the fellow has been dead a day or two, though it don't do to build too much on doctors' evidence. It's an entertainin' little problem."

"Very curious, dear. But so sad about poor Sir Reuben. I must write a few lines to Lady Levy; I used to know her quite well, you know, dear, down in Hampshire, when she was a girl. Christine Ford, she was then, and I remember so well the dreadful trouble there was about her marrying a Jew. That was before he made his money, of course, in that oil business out in America. The family wanted her to marry Julian Freke, who did so well afterwards and was connected with the family, but she fell in love with this Mr. Levy and eloped with him. He was very handsome, then, you know, dear, in a foreign-looking way, but he hadn't any means, and the Fords didn't like his religion. Of course we're all Jews nowadays, and they wouldn't have minded so much if he'd pretended to be something else, like that Mr. Simons we met at Mrs. Porchester's, who always tells everybody that he got his nose in Italy at the Renaissance, and claims to be descended somehow or other from La Bella Simonetta—so foolish, you know, dear—as if anybody believed it; and I'm sure some Jews are very good people, and personally I'd much rather they believed something, though of course it must be very

inconvenient, what with not working on Saturdays and circumcising the poor little babies and everything depending on the new moon and that funny kind of meat they have with such a slang-sounding name, and never being able to have bacon for breakfast. Still, there it was, and it was much better for the girl to marry him if she was really fond of him, though I believe young Freke was really devoted to her, and they're still great friends. Not that there was ever a real engagement, only a sort of understanding with her father, but he's never married, you know, and lives all by himself in that big house next to the hospital, though he's very rich and distinguished now, and I know ever so many people have tried to get hold of him—there was Lady Mainwaring wanted him for that eldest girl of hers, though I remember saying at the time it was no use expecting a surgeon to be taken in by a figure that was all padding—they have so many opportunities of judging, you know, dear."

"Lady Levy seems to have had the knack of makin' people devoted to her," said Peter. "Look at the pea-green incorruptible Levy."

"That's quite true, dear; she was a most delightful girl, and they say her daughter is just like her. I rather lost sight of them when she married, and you know your father didn't care much about business people, but I know everybody always said they were a model couple. In fact it was a proverb that Sir Reuben was as well loved at home as he was hated abroad. I don't mean in foreign countries, you know, dear—just the

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proverbial way of putting things—like ‘a saint abroad and a devil at home’—only the other way on, reminding one of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*.”

“Yes,” said Peter, “I daresay the old man made one or two enemies.”

“Dozens, dear—such a dreadful place, the City, isn’t it? Everybody Ishmaels together—though I don’t suppose Sir Reuben would like to be called that, would he? Doesn’t it mean illegitimate, or not a proper Jew, anyway? I always did get confused with those Old Testament characters.”

Lord Peter laughed and yawned.

“I think I’ll turn in for an hour or two,” he said. “I must be back in town at eight—Parker’s coming to breakfast.”

The Duchess looked at the clock, which marked five minutes to three.

“I’ll send up your breakfast at half-past six, dear,” she said. “I hope you’ll find everything all right. I told them just to slip a hot-water bottle in; those linen sheets are so chilly; you can put it out if it’s in your way.”

CHAPTER IV

"—SO THERE IT IS, PARKER," SAID LORD PETER, PUSHING his coffee-cup aside and lighting his after-breakfast pipe; "you may find it leads you to something, though it don't seem to get me any further with my bathroom problem. Did you do anything more at that after I left?"

"No; but I've been on the roof this morning."

"The deuce you have—what an energetic devil you are! I say, Parker, I think this co-operative scheme is an uncommonly good one. It's much easier to work on someone else's job than one's own—gives one that delightful feelin' of interferin' and bossin' about, combined with the glorious sensation that another fellow is takin' all one's own work off one's hands. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, what? Did you find anything?"

"Not very much. I looked for any footmarks of course, but naturally, with all this rain, there wasn't a sign. Of course, if this were a detective story, there'd have been a convenient shower exactly an hour before the crime and a beautiful set of marks which could only have come there between two and three in the morning, but this being real life in a London November, you might as well expect footprints in Niagara. I searched the roofs right along—and came to the jolly conclusion that any person in

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any blessed flat in the blessed row might have done it. All the staircases open on to the roof and the leads are quite flat; you can walk along as easy as along Shaftesbury Avenue. Still, I've got some evidence that the body did walk along there.

"What's that?"

Parker brought out his pocketbook and extracted a few shreds of material, which he laid before his friend.

"One was caught in the gutter just above Thipps's bathroom window, another in a crack of the stone parapet just over it, and the rest came from the chimney-stack behind, where they had caught in an iron stanchion. What do you make of them?"

Lord Peter scrutinized them very carefully through his lens.

"Interesting," he said, "damned interesting. Have you developed those plates, Bunter?" he added, as that discreet assistant came in with the post.

"Yes, my lord."

"Caught anything?"

"I don't know whether to call it anything or not, my lord," said Bunter, dubiously. "I'll bring the prints in."

"Do," said Wimsey. "Hallo! here's our advertisement about the gold chain in the *Times*—very nice it looks: 'Write, 'phone or call 1110, Piccadilly.' Perhaps it would have been safer to put a box number, though I always think that the franker you are with people, the more you're likely to deceive 'em; so unused is

the modern world to the open hand and the guileless heart, what?"

"But you don't think the fellow who left that chain on the body is going to give himself away by coming here and inquiring about it?"

"I don't, fathead," said Lord Peter, with the easy politeness of the real aristocracy; "that's why I've tried to get hold of the jeweller who originally sold the chain. See?" He pointed to the paragraph. "It's not an old chain—hardly worn at all. Oh, thanks, Bunter. Now, see here, Parker, these are the finger-marks you noticed yesterday on the window-sash and on the far edge of the bath. I'd overlooked them; I give you full credit for the discovery, I crawl, I grovel, my name is Watson, and you need not say what you were just going to say, because I admit it all. Now we shall—Hullo, hullo, hullo!"

The three men stared at the photographs.

"The criminal," said Lord Peter, bitterly, "climbed over the roofs in the wet and not unnaturally got soot on his fingers. He arranged the body in the bath, and wiped away all traces of himself except two, which he obligingly left to show us how to do our job. We learn from a smudge on the floor that he wore india rubber boots, and from this admirable set of finger-prints on the edge of the bath that he had the usual number of fingers and wore rubber gloves. That's the kind of man he is. Take the fool away, gentlemen."

He put the prints aside, and returned to an exami-

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nation of the shreds of material in his hand. Suddenly he whistled softly.

"Do you make anything of these, Parker?"

"They seemed to me to be ravellings of some coarse cotton stuff—a sheet, perhaps, or an improvised rope."

"Yes," said Lord Peter—"yes. It may be a mistake—it may be *our* mistake. I wonder. Tell me, d'you think these tiny threads are long enough and strong enough to hang a man?"

He was silent, his long eyes narrowing into slits behind the smoke of his pipe.

"What do you suggest doing this morning?" asked Parker.

"Well," said Lord Peter, "it seems to me it's about time I took a hand in your job. Let's go round to Park Lane and see what larks Sir Reuben Levy was up to in bed last night."

"And now, Mrs. Pemming, if you would be so kind as to give me a blanket," said Mr. Bunter, coming down into the kitchen, "and permit of me hanging a sheet across the lower part of this window, and drawing the screen across here, so—so as to shut off any reflections, if you understand me, we'll get to work."

Sir Reuben Levy's cook, with her eye upon Mr. Bunter's gentlemanly and well-tailored appearance, hastened to produce what was necessary. Her visitor placed on the table a basket, containing a water-bottle, a silver-backed hair-brush, a pair of boots, a small roll of linoleum, and the "Letters of a Self-

made Merchant to His Son," bound in polished morocco. He drew an umbrella from beneath his arm and added it to the collection. He then advanced a ponderous photographic machine and set it up in the neighbourhood of the kitchen range; then, spreading a newspaper over the fair, scrubbed surface of the table, he began to roll up his sleeves and insinuate himself into a pair of surgical gloves. Sir Reuben Levy's valet, entering at the moment and finding him thus engaged, put aside the kitchen-maid, who was staring from a front-row position, and inspected the apparatus critically. Mr. Bunter nodded brightly to him, and uncorked a small bottle of grey powder.

"Odd sort of fish, your employer, isn't he?" said the valet, carelessly.

"Very singular, indeed," said Mr. Bunter. "Now, my dear," he added, ingratiatingly, to the kitchen-maid, "I wonder if you'd just pour a little of this grey powder over the edge of the bottle while I'm holding it—and the same with this boot—here, at the top—thank you, Miss—what is your name? Price? Oh, but you've got another name besides Price, haven't you? Mabel, eh? That's a name I'm uncommonly partial to—that's very nicely done, you've a steady hand, Miss Mabel—see that? That's the finger marks—three there, and two here, and smudged over in both places. No, don't you touch 'em, my dear, or you'll rub the bloom off. We'll stand 'em up here till they're ready to have their portraits taken. Now then. let's take the hair-brush next. Perhaps, Mrs.

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Pemming, you'd like to lift him up very carefully by the bristles."

"By the bristles, Mr. Bunter?"

"If you please, Mrs. Pemming—and lay him here. Now, Miss Mabel, another little exhibition of your skill, *if* you please. No—we'll try lamp-black this time. Perfect. Couldn't have done it better myself. Ah! there's a beautiful set. No smudges this time. That'll interest his lordship. Now the little book—no, I'll pick that up myself—with these gloves, you see, and by the edges—I'm a careful criminal, Mrs. Pemming, I don't want to leave any traces. Dust the cover all over, Miss Mabel; now this side—that's the way to do it. Lots of prints and no smudges. All according to plan. Oh, please, Mr. Graves, you mustn't touch it—it's as much as my place is worth to have it touched."

"D'you have to do much of this sort of thing?" inquired Mr. Graves, from a superior standpoint.

"Any amount," replied Mr. Bunter, with a groan calculated to appeal to Mr. Graves's heart and unlock his confidence. "If you'd kindly hold one end of this bit of linoleum, Mrs. Pemming, I'll hold up this end while Miss Mabel operates. Yes, Mr. Graves, it's a hard life, valeting by day and developing by night—morning tea at any time from 6.30 to 11, and criminal investigation at all hours. It's wonderful, the ideas these rich men with nothing to do get into their heads."

"I wonder you stand it," said Mr. Graves. "Now there's none of that here. A quiet, orderly, domestic life, Mr. Bunter, has much to be said for it. Meals at

regular hours; decent, respectable families to dinner—none of your painted women—and no valeting at night, there's *much* to be said for it. I don't hold with Hebrews as a rule, Mr. Bunter, and of course I understand that you may find it to your advantage to be in a titled family, but there's less thought of that these days, and I will say, for a self-made man, no one could call Sir Reuben vulgar, and my lady at any rate is county—Miss Ford, she was, one of the Hampshire Fords, and both of them always most considerate."

"I agree with you, Mr. Graves—his lordship and me have never held with being narrow-minded—why, yes, my dear, of course it's a footmark, this is the washstand linoleum. A good Jew can be a good man, that's what I've always said. And regular hours and considerate habits have a great deal to recommend them. Very simple in his tastes, now, Sir Reuben, isn't he? for such a rich man, I mean."

"Very simple indeed," said the cook; "the meals he and her ladyship have when they're by themselves with Miss Rachel—well, there now—if it wasn't for the dinners, which is always good when there's company, I'd be wastin' my talents and education here, if you understand me, Mr. Bunter."

Mr. Bunter added the handle of the umbrella to his collection, and began to pin a sheet across the window, aided by the housemaid.

"Admirable," said he. "Now, if I might have this blanket on the table and another on a towel-horse or something of that kind by way of a background—

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you're very kind, Mrs. Pemming. . . . Ah! I wish his lordship never wanted valeting at night. Many's the time I've sat up till three and four, and up again to call him early to go off Sherlocking at the other end of the country. And the mud he gets on his clothes and his boots!"

"I'm sure it's a shame, Mr. Bunter," said Mrs. Pemming, warmly. "Low, I calls it. In my opinion, police-work ain't no fit occupation for a gentleman, let alone a lordship."

"Everything made so difficult, too," said Mr. Bunter nobly sacrificing his employer's character and his own feelings in a good cause; "boots chucked into a corner, clothes hung up on the floor, as they say—"

"That's often the case with these men as are born with a silver spoon in their mouths," said Mr. Graves. "Now, Sir Reuben, he's never lost his good old-fashioned habits. Clothes folded up neat, boots put out in his dressing-room, so as a man could get them in the morning, everything made easy."

"He forgot them the night before last, though."

"The clothes, not the boots. Always thoughtful for others, is Sir Reuben. Ah! I hope nothing's happened to him."

"Indeed, no, poor gentleman," chimed in the cook, "and as for what they're sayin', that he'd 'ave gone out surrepshous-like to do something he didn't ought, well, I'd never believe it of him, Mr. Bunter, not if I was to take my dying oath upon it."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bunter, adjusting his arc-lamps and connecting them with the nearest electric light, "and

that's more than most of us could say of them as pays us."

"Five foot ten," said Lord Peter, "and not an inch more." He peered dubiously at the depression in the bed clothes, and measured it a second time with the gentleman-scout's vade-mecum. Parker entered this particular in a neat pocketbook.

"I suppose," he said, "a six-foot-two man *might* leave a five-foot-ten depression if he curled himself up."

"Have you any Scotch blood in you, Parker?" inquired his colleague, bitterly.

"Not that I know of," replied Parker. "Why?"

"Because of all the cautious, ungenerous, deliberate and cold-blooded devils I know," said Lord Peter, "you are the most cautious, ungenerous, deliberate and cold-blooded. Here am I, sweating my brains out to introduce a really sensational incident into your dull and disreputable little police investigation, and you refuse to show a single spark of enthusiasm."

"Well, it's no good jumping at conclusions."

"Jump? You don't even crawl distantly within sight of a conclusion. I believe if you caught the cat with her head in the cream-jug you'd say it was conceivable that the jug was empty when she got there."

"Well, it would be conceivable, wouldn't it?"

"Curse you," said Lord Peter. He screwed his monocle into his eye, and bent over the pillow, breathing hard and tightly through his nose. "Here, give me the tweezers," he said presently. "Good heavens, man,

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don't blow like that, you might be a whale." He nipped up an almost invisible object from the linen.

"What is it?" asked Parker.

"It's a hair," said Wimsey grimly, his hard eyes growing harder. "Let's go and look at Levy's hats, shall we? And you might just ring for that fellow with the churchyard name, do you mind?"

Mr. Graves, when summoned, found Lord Peter Wimsey squatting on the floor of the dressing-room before a row of hats arranged upside down before him.

"Here you are," said that nobleman cheerfully. "Now, Graves, this is a guessin' competition—a sort of three-hat trick, to mix metaphors. Here are nine hats, including three top-hats. Do you identify all these hats as belonging to Sir Reuben Levy? You do? Very good. Now I have three guesses as to which hat he wore the night he disappeared, and if I guess right, I win; if I don't, you win. See? Ready? Go. I suppose you know the answer yourself, by the way?"

"Do I understand your lordship to be asking which hat Sir Reuben wore when he went out on Monday night, your lordship?"

"No, you don't understand a bit," said Lord Peter. "I'm asking if *you* know—don't tell me, I'm going to guess."

"I do know, your lordship," said Mr. Graves, reprovingly.

"Well," said Lord Peter, "as he was dinin' at the Ritz he wore a topper. Here are three toppers. In three guesses I'd be bound to hit the right one,

wouldn't I? That don't seem very sportin'. I'll take one guess. It was this one."

He indicated the hat next the window.

"Am I right, Graves—have I got the prize?"

"That *is* the hat in question, my lord," said Mr. Graves, without excitement.

"Thanks," said Lord Peter, "that's all I wanted to know. Ask Bunter to step up, would you?"

Mr. Bunter stepped up with an aggrieved air, and his usually smooth hair ruffled by the focussing cloth.

"Oh, there you are, Bunter," said Lord Peter; "look here—"

"Here I am, my lord," said Mr. Bunter, with respectful reproach, "but if you'll excuse me saying so, downstairs is where I ought to be, with all those young women about—they'll be fingering the evidence, my lord."

"I cry your mercy," said Lord Peter, "but I've quarrelled hopelessly with Mr. Parker and distracted the estimable Graves, and I want you to tell me what finger-prints you have found. I shan't be happy till I get it, so don't be harsh with me, Bunter."

"Well, my lord, your lordship understands I haven't photographed them yet, but I won't deny that their appearance is interesting, my lord. The little book off the night table, my lord, has only the marks of one set of fingers—there's a little scar on the right thumb which makes them easy recognised. The hair-brush, too, my lord, has only the same set of marks. The umbrella, the toothglass and the boots all have two sets: the hand with the scarred thumb, which I

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take to be Sir Reuben's, my lord, and a set of smudges superimposed upon them, if I may put it that way, my lord, which may or may not be the same hand in rubber gloves. I could tell you better when I've got the photographs made, to measure them, my lord. The linoleum in front of the washstand is very gratifying indeed, my lord, if you will excuse my mentioning it. Besides the marks of Sir Reuben's boots which your lordship pointed out, there's the print of a man's naked foot—a much smaller one, my lord, not much more than a tin-inch sock, I should say if you asked me."

Lord Peter's face became irradiated with almost a dim, religious light.

"A mistake," he breathed, "a mistake, a little one, but he can't afford it. When was the linoleum washed last, Bunter?"

"Monday morning, my lord. The housemaid did it and remembered to mention it. Only remark she's made yet, and it's to the point. The other domestics—"

His features expressed disdain.

"What did I say, Parker? Five-foot-ten and not an inch longer. And he didn't dare to use the hair-brush. Beautiful. But he *had* to risk the top-hat. Gentleman can't walk home in the rain late at night without a hat, you know, Parker. Look! what do you make of it? Two sets of finger-prints on everything but the book and the brush, two sets of feet on the linoleum, and two kinds of hair in the hat!"

He lifted the top-hat to the light, and extracted the evidence with tweezers.

"Think of it, Parker—to remember the hair-brush and forget the hat—to remember his fingers all the time, and to make that one careless step on the tell-tale linoleum. Here they are, you see, black hair and tan hair—black hair in the bowler and the panama, and black and tan in last night's topper. And then, just to make certain that we're on the right track, just one little auburn hair on the pillow, on this pillow, Parker, which isn't quite in the right place. It almost brings tears to my eyes."

"Do you mean to say—" said the detective, slowly.

"I mean to say," said Lord Peter, "that it was not Sir Reuben Levy whom the cook saw last night on the doorstep. I say that it was another man, perhaps a couple of inches shorter, who came here in Levy's clothes and let himself in with Levy's latchkey. Oh, he was a bold, cunning devil, Parker. He had on Levy's boots, and every stitch of Levy's clothing down to the skin. He had rubber gloves on his hands which he never took off, and he did everything he could to make us think that Levy slept here last night. He took his chances, and won. He walked upstairs, he undressed, he even washed and cleaned his teeth, though he didn't use the hair-brush for fear of leaving red hairs in it. He had to guess what Levy did with boots and clothes; one guess was wrong and the other right, as it happened. The bed must look as if it had been slept in, so he gets in, and lies there in his victim's very pyjamas. Then, in the morning sometime, prob-

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ably in the deadeast hour between two and three, he gets up, dresses himself in his own clothes that he has brought with him in a bag, and creeps downstairs. If anybody wakes, he is lost, but he is a bold man, and he takes his chance. He knows that people do not wake as a rule—and they don't wake. He opens the street door which he left on the latch when he came in—he listens for the stray passer-by or the policeman on his beat. He slips out. He pulls the door quietly to with the latchkey. He walks briskly away in rubber-soled shoes—he's the kind of criminal who isn't complete without rubber-soled shoes. In a few minutes he is at Hyde Park Corner. After that—"

He paused, and added:

"He did all that, and unless he had nothing at stake, he had everything at stake. Either Sir Reuben Levy has been spirited away for some silly practical joke, or the man with the auburn hair has the guilt of murder upon his soul."

"Dear me!" ejaculated the detective, "you're very dramatic about it."

Lord Peter passed his hand rather wearily over his hair.

"My true friend," he murmured in a voice surcharged with emotion, "you recall me to the nursery rhymes of my youth—the sacred duty of flippancy:

"There was an old man of Whitehaven
Who danced a quadrille with a raven,
But they said: It's absurd
To encourage that bird—
So they smashed that old man of Whitehaven.

That's the correct attitude, Parker. Here's a poor old buffer spirited away—such a joke—and I don't believe he'd hurt a fly himself—that makes it funnier. D'you know, Parker, I don't care frightfully about this case after all."

"Which, this or yours?"

"Both. I say, Parker, shall we go quietly home and have lunch and go to the Coliseum?"

"You can if you like," replied the detective; "but you forget I do this for my bread and butter."

"And I haven't even that excuse," said Lord Peter; "well, what's the next move? What would you do in my case?"

"I'd so some good, hard grind," said Parker. "I'd distrust every bit of work Sugg ever did, and I'd get the family history of every tenant of every flat in Queen Caroline Mansions. I'd examine all their box-rooms and rooftraps, and I would inveigle them into conversations and suddenly bring in the words 'body' and 'pince-nez,' and see if they wriggled, like those modern psycho-what's-his-names."

"You would, would you?" said Lord Peter with a grin. "Well, we've exchanged cases, you know, so just you toddle off and do it. I'm going to have a jolly time at Wyndham's."

Parker made a grimace.

"Well," he said, "I don't suppose you'd ever do it, so I'd better. You'll never become a professional till you learn to do a little work, Wimsey. How about lunch?"

"I'm invited out," said Lord Peter, magnificently.

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"I'll run around and change at the club. Can't feed with Freddy Arbuthnot in these bags; Bunter!"

"Yes, my lord."

"Pack up if you're ready, and come round and wash my face and hands for me at the club."

"Work here for another two hours, my lord. Can't do with less than thirty minutes' exposure. The current's none too strong."

"You see how I'm bullied by my own man, Parker? Well, I must bear it, I suppose. Ta-ta!"

He whistled his way downstairs.

The conscientious Mr. Parker, with a groan, settled down to a systematic search through Sir Reuben Levy's papers, with the assistance of a plate of ham sandwiches and a bottle of Bass.

Lord Peter and the Honourable Freddy Arbuthnot, looking together like an advertisement for gents' trouserings, strolled into the dining-room at Wyndham's.

"Haven't seen you for an age," said the Honourable Freddy. "What have you been doin' with yourself?"

"Oh, foolin' about," said Lord Peter, languidly.

"Thick or clear, sir?" inquired the waiter of the Honourable Freddy.

"Which'll you have, Wimsey?" said that gentleman, transferring the burden of selection to his guest.

"They're both equally poisonous."

"Well, clear's less trouble to lick out of the spoon," said Lord Peter.

"Clear," said the Honourable Freddy.

"Consommé Polonais," agreed the waiter. "Very nice, sir."

Conversation languished until the Honourable Freddy found a bone in the filleted sole, and sent for the head waiter to explain its presence. When this matter had been adjusted Lord Peter found energy to say:

"Sorry to hear about your gov'nor, old man."

"Yes, poor old buffer," said the Honourable Freddy; "they say he can't last long now. What? Oh! the Montrachet '08. There's nothing fit to drink in this place," he added gloomily.

After this deliberate insult to a noble vintage there was a further pause, till Lord Peter said: "How's 'Change?"

"Rotten," said the Honourable Freddy.

He helped himself gloomily to salmis of game.

"Can I do anything?" asked Lord Peter.

"Oh, no, thanks—very decent of you, but it'll pan out all right in time."

"This isn't a bad salmis," said Lord Peter.

"I've eaten worse," admitted his friend.

"What about those Argentines?" inquired Lord Peter. "Here, waiter, there's a bit of cork in my glass."

"Cork?" cried the Honourable Freddy, with something approaching animation; "you'll hear about this, waiter. It's an amazing thing a fellow who's paid to do the job can't manage to take a cork out of a bottle. What you say? Argentines? Gone all to hell.

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Old Levy bunkin' off like that's knocked the bottom out of the market."

"You don't say so," said Lord Peter. "What d'you suppose has happened to the old man?"

"Cursed if I know," said the Honourable Freddy; "knocked on the head by the bears, I should think."

"P'r'aps he's gone off on his own," suggested Lord Peter. "Double life, you know. Giddy old blighters, some of these City men."

"Oh, no," said the Honourable Freddy, faintly roused; "no, hang it all, Wimsey, I wouldn't care to say that. He's a decent old domestic bird, and his daughter's a charmin' girl. Besides, he's straight enough—he'd *do* you down fast enough, but he wouldn't *let* you down. Old Anderson is badly cut up about it."

"Who's Anderson?"

"Chap with property out there. He belongs here. He was goin' to meet Levy on Tuesday. He's afraid those railway people will get in now, and then it'll be all U. P."

"Who's runnin' the railway people over here?" inquired Lord Peter.

"Yankee blighter, John P. Milligan. He's got an option, or says he has. You can't trust these brutes."

"Can't Anderson hold on?"

"Anderson isn't Levy. Hasn't got the shekels. Besides, he's only one. Levy covers the ground—he could boycott Milligan's beastly railway if he liked. That's where he's got the pull, you see."

"B'lieve I met the Milligan man somewhere," said

Lord Peter, thoughtfully. "Ain't he a hulking brute with black hair and a beard?"

"You're thinkin' of somebody else," said the Honourable Freddy. "Milligan don't stand any higher than I do, unless you call five-feet-ten hulking—and he's bald, anyway."

Lord Peter considered this over the Gorgonzola. Then he said: "Didn't know Levy had a charmin' daughter."

"Oh, yes," said the Honourable Freddy, with an elaborate detachment. "Met her and Mamma last year abroad. That's how I got to know the old man. He's been very decent. Let me into this Argentine business on the ground floor, don't you know?"

"Well," said Lord Peter, "you might do worse. Money's money, ain't it? And Lady Levy is quite a redeemin' point. At least, my mother knew her people."

"Oh, *she's* all right," said the Honourable Freddy, "and the old man's nothing to be ashamed of nowadays. He's self-made, of course, but he don't pretend to be anything else. No side. Toddles off to business on a 96 'bus every morning. 'Can't make up my mind to taxis, my boy,' he says. 'I had to look at every half-penny when I was a young man, and I can't get out of the way of it now.' Though, if he's takin' his family out, nothing's too good. Rachel—that's the girl—always laughs at the old man's little economies."

"I suppose they've sent for Lady Levy," said Lord Peter.

"I suppose so," agreed the other. "I'd better pop

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round and express sympathy or somethin', what? Wouldn't look well not to, d'you think? But it's deuced awkward. What am I to say?"

"I don't think it matters much what you say," said Lord Peter, helpfully. "I should ask if you can do anything."

"Thanks," said the lover, "I will. Energetic young man. Count on me. Always at your service. Ring me up any time of the day or night. That's the line to take, don't you think?"

"That's the idea," said Lord Peter.

Mr. John P. Milligan, the London representative of the great Milligan railroad and shipping company, was dictating code cables to his secretary in an office in Lombard Street, when a card was brought up to him, bearing the simple legend:

LORD PETER WIMSEY

Marlborough Club

Mr. Milligan was annoyed at the interruption, but, like many of his nation, if he had a weak point, it was the British aristocracy. He postponed for a few minutes the elimination from the map of a modest but promising farm, and directed that the visitor should be shown up.

"Good-afternoon," said that nobleman, ambling genially in, "it's most uncommonly good of you to let me come round wastin' your time like this. I'll try not to be too long about it, though I'm not awfully good at comin' to the point. My brother never would

let me stand for the county, y'know—said I wandered on so nobody'd know what I was talkin' about."

"Pleased to meet you, Lord Wimsey," said Mr. Milligan. "Won't you take a seat?"

"Thanks," said Lord Peter, "but I'm not a peer, you know—that's my brother Denver. My name's Peter. It's a silly name, I always think, so old-world and full of homely virtue and that sort of thing, but my god-fathers and godmothers in my baptism are responsible for that, I suppose, officially—which is rather hard on them, you know, as they didn't actually choose it. But we always have a Peter, after the third duke, who betrayed five kings somewhere about the Wars of the Roses, though come to think of it, it ain't anything to be proud of. Still, one has to make the best of it."

Mr. Milligan, thus ingeniously placed at that disadvantage which attends ignorance, manoeuvred for position, and offered his interrupter a Corona Corona.

"Thanks, awfully," said Lord Peter, "though you really mustn't tempt me to stay here burblin' all afternoon. By Jove, Mr. Milligan, if you offer people such comfortable chairs and cigars like these, I wonder they don't come an' live in your office." He added mentally: "I wish to goodness I could get those long-toed boots off you. How's a man to know the size of your feet? And a head like a potato. It's enough to make one swear."

"Say now, Lord Peter," said Mr. Milligan, "can I do anything for you?"

"Well, d'you know," said Lord Peter, "I'm wonderin' if you would. It's damned cheek to ask you,

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but fact is, it's my mother, you know. Wonderful woman, but don't realize what it means, demands on the time of a busy man like you. We don't understand hustle over here, you know, Mr. Milligan."

"Now don't you mention that," said Mr. Milligan; "I'd be surely charmed to do anything to oblige the Duchess."

He felt a momentary qualm as to whether a duke's mother were also a duchess, but breathed more freely as Lord Peter went on:

"Thanks—that's uncommonly good of you. Well, now, it's like this. My mother—most energetic, self-sacrificin' woman, don't you see, is thinkin' of gettin' up a sort of a charity bazaar down at Denver this winter, in aid of the church roof, y'know. Very sad case, Mr. Milligan—fine old antique—early English windows and decorated angel roof, and all that—all tumblin' to pieces, rain pourin' in and so on—vicar catchin' rheumatism at early service, owin' to the draught blowin' in over the altar—you know the sort of thing. They've got a man down startin' on it—little beggar called Thipps—lives with an aged mother in Battersea—vulgar little beast, but quite good on angel roofs and things, I'm told."

At this point, Lord Peter watched his interlocutor narrowly, but finding that this rigmarole produced in him no reaction more startling than polite interest tinged with faint bewilderment, he abandoned this line of investigation, and proceeded:

"I say, I beg your pardon, frightfully—I'm afraid I'm bein' beastly long-winded. Fact is, my mother

is gettin' up this bazaar, and she thought it'd be an awfully interestin' side-show to have some lectures—sort of little talks, y'know—by eminent business men of all nations. 'How I Did It' kind of touch, y'know—'A Drop of Oil with a Kerosene King'—'Cash Conscience and Cocoa' and so on. It would interest people down there no end. You see, all my mother's friends will be there, and we've none of us any money—not what you'd call money, I mean—I expect our incomes wouldn't pay your telephone calls, would they?—but we like awfully to hear about the people who can make money. Gives us a sort of uplifted feelin', don't you know. Well, anyway, I mean, my mother'd be frightfully pleased and grateful to you, Mr. Milligan, if you'd come down and give us a few words as a representative American. It needn't take more than ten minutes or so, y'know, because the local people can't understand much beyond shootin' and huntin', and my mother's crowd can't keep their minds on anythin' more than ten minutes together, but we'd really appreciate it very much if you'd come and stay a day or two and just give us a little breezy word on the almighty dollar."

"Why, yes," said Mr. Milligan, "I'd like to, Lord Peter. It's kind of the Duchess to suggest it. It's a very sad thing when these fine old antiques begin to wear out. I'll come with great pleasure. And perhaps you'd be kind enough to accept a little donation to the Restoration Fund."

This unexpected development nearly brought Lord Peter up all standing. To pump, by means of an

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ingenious lie, a hospitable gentleman whom you are inclined to suspect of a peculiarly malicious murder, and to accept from him in the course of the proceedings a large cheque for a charitable object, has something about it unpalatable to any but the hardened Secret Service agent. Lord Peter temporized.

"That's awfully decent of you," he said. "I'm sure they'd be no end grateful. But you'd better not give it to me, you know. I might spend it, or lose it. I'm not very reliable, I'm afraid. The vicar's the right person—the Rev. Constantine Throgmorton, St. John-before-the-Latin-Gate Vicarage, Duke's Den-ver, if you like to send it there."

"I will," said Mr. Milligan. "Will you write it out now for a thousand pounds, Scoot, in case it slips my mind later?"

The secretary, a sandy-haired young man with a long chin and no eyebrows, silently did as he was requested. Lord Peter looked from the bald head of Mr. Milligan to the red head of the secretary, hardened his heart and tried again.

"Well, I'm no end grateful to you, Mr. Milligan, and so'll my mother be when I tell her. I'll let you know the date of the bazaar—it's not quite settled yet, and I've got to see some other business men, don't you know. I thought of askin' someone from one of the big newspaper combines to represent British advertisin' talent, what?—and a friend of mine promises me a leadin' German financier—very interestin' if there ain't too much feelin' against it down in the country, and I'll have to find somebody or other to

do the Hebrew point of view. I thought of askin' Levy, y'know, only he's floated off in this inconvenient way."

"Yes," said Mr. Milligan, "that's a very curious thing, though I don't mind saying, Lord Peter, that it's a convenience to me. He had a cinch on my railroad combine, but I'd nothing against him personally, and if he turns up after I've brought off a little deal I've got on, I'll be happy to give him the right hand of welcome."

A vision passed through Lord Peter's mind of Sir Reuben kept somewhere in custody till a financial crisis was over. This was exceedingly possible, and far more agreeable than his earlier conjecture; it also agreed better with the impression he was forming of Mr. Milligan.

"Well, it's a rum go," said Lord Peter, "but I dare say he had his reasons. Much better not inquire into people's reasons, y'know, what? Specially as a police friend of mine who's connected with the case says the old johnnie dyed his hair before he went."

Out of the tail of his eye, Lord Peter saw the red-headed secretary add up five columns of figures simultaneously and jot down the answer.

"Dyed his hair, did he?" said Mr. Milligan.

"Dyed it red," said Lord Peter. The secretary looked up. "Odd thing is," continued Wimsey, "they can't lay hands on the bottle. Somethin' fishy there, don't you think, what?"

The secretary's interest seemed to have evaporated. He inserted a fresh sheet into his looseleaf ledger, and

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carried forward a row of digits from the preceding page.

"I daresay there's nothin' in it," said Lord Peter, rising to go. "Well, it's uncommonly good of you to be bothered with me like this, Mr. Milligan—my mother'll be no end pleased. She'll write you about the date."

"I'm charmed," said Mr. Milligan. "Very pleased to have met you."

Mr. Scoot rose silently to open the door, uncoiling as he did so a portentous length of thin leg, hitherto hidden by the desk. With a mental sigh Lord Peter estimated him at six-foot-four.

"It's a pity I can't put Scoot's head on Milligan's shoulders," said Lord Peter, emerging into the swirl of the city. "And what *will* my mother say?"

CHAPTER V

MR. PARKER WAS A BACHELOR, AND OCCUPIED A Georgian but inconvenient flat at No. 12A Great Ormond Street, for which he paid a pound a week. His exertions in the cause of civilization were rewarded, not by the gift of diamond rings from empresses or munificent cheques from grateful Prime Ministers, but by a modest, though sufficient, salary, drawn from the pockets of the British taxpayer. He awoke, after a long day of arduous and inconclusive labour, to the smell of burnt porridge. Through his bedroom window, hygienically open top and bottom, a raw fog was rolling slowly in, and the sight of a pair of winter pants, flung hastily over a chair the previous night, fretted him with a sense of the sordid absurdity of the human form. The telephone bell rang, and he crawled wretchedly out of bed and into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Munns, who did for him by the day, was laying the table, sneezing as she went.

Mr. Bunter was speaking.

"His lordship says he'd be very glad, sir, if you could make it convenient to step round to breakfast."

If the odour of kidneys and bacon had been wafted along the wire, Mr. Parker could not have experienced a more vivid sense of consolation.

"Tell his lordship I'll be with him in half an hour,"

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he said, thankfully, and plunging into the bathroom, which was also the kitchen, he informed Mrs. Munns, who was just making tea from a kettle which had gone off the boil, that he should be out to breakfast.

"You can take the porridge home for the family," he added, viciously, and flung off his dressing-gown with such determination that Mrs. Munns could only scuttle away with a snort.

A 19 'bus deposited him in Piccadilly only fifteen minutes later than his rather sanguine impulse had prompted him to suggest, and Mr. Bunter served him with glorious food, incomparable coffee, and the *Daily Mail* before a blazing fire of wood and coal. A distant voice singing the "et iterum venturus est" from Bach's Mass in B minor proclaimed that for the owner of the flat cleanliness and godliness met at least once a day, and presently Lord Peter roamed in, moist and verbenascent, in a bath-robe cheerfully patterned with unnaturally variegated peacocks.

"Mornin', old dear," said that gentleman. "Beast of a day, ain't it? Very good of you to trundle out in it, but I had a letter I wanted you to see, and I hadn't the energy to come round to your place. Bunter and I've been makin' a night of it."

"What's the letter?" asked Parker.

"Never talk business with your mouth full," said Lord Peter, reprovingly; "have some Oxford marmalade—and then I'll show you my Dante; they brought it round last night. What ought I to read this morning, Bunter?"

"Lord Erith's collection is going to be sold, my lord. There is a column about it in the *Morning Post*. I think your lordship should look at this review of Sir Julian Freke's new book on 'The Physiological Bases of the Conscience' in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Then there is a very singular little burglary in the *Chronicle*, my lord, and an attack on titled families in the *Herald*—rather ill-written, if I may say so, but not without unconscious humour which your lordship will appreciate."

"All right, give me that and the burglary," said his lordship.

"I have looked over the other papers," pursued Mr. Bunter, indicating a formidable pile, "and marked your lordship's after-breakfast reading."

"Oh, pray don't allude to it," said Lord Peter; "you take my appetite away."

There was silence, but for the crunching of toast and the crackling of paper.

"I see they adjourned the inquest," said Parker presently.

"Nothing else to do," said Lord Peter; "but Lady Levy arrived last night, and will have to go and fail to identify the body this morning for Sugg's benefit."

"Time, too," said Mr. Parker shortly.

Silence fell again.

"I don't think much of your burglary, Bunter," said Lord Peter. "Competent, of course, but no imagination. I want imagination in a criminal. Where's the *Morning Post*?"

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After a further silence, Lord Peter said: "You might send for the catalogue, Bunter, that Apollonios Rhodios * might be worth looking at. No, I'm damned if I'm going to stodge through that review, but you can stick the book on the library list if you like. His book on crime was entertainin' enough as far as it went, but the fellow's got a bee in his bonnet. Thinks God's a secretion of the liver—all right once in a way, but there's no need to keep on about it. There's nothing you can't prove if your outlook is only sufficiently limited. Look at Sugg."

"I beg your pardon," said Parker; "I wasn't attending. Argentines are steadyin' a little, I see."

"Milligan," said Lord Peter.

"Oil's in a bad way. Levy's made a difference there. That funny little boom in Peruvians that came on just before he disappeared has died away again. I wonder if he was concerned in it. D'you know at all?"

"I'll find out," said Lord Peter. "What was it?"

"Oh, an absolutely dud enterprise that hadn't been heard of for years. It suddenly took a little lease of life last week. I happened to notice it because my mother got let in for a couple of hundred shares a long time ago. It never paid a dividend. Now it's petered out again."

Wimsey pushed his plate aside and lit a pipe.

"Having finished, I don't mind doing some work," he said. "How did you get on yesterday?"

* Apollonios Rhodios. *Lorenzobodi Alopa*. Firenze, 1496. (4to.) The excitement attendant on the solution of the Battersea Mystery did not prevent Lord Peter from securing this rare work before his departure for Corsica.

"I didn't," replied Parker. "I sleuthed up and down those flats in my own bodily shape and two different disguises. I was a gas-meter man and a collector for a Home for Lost Doggies, and I didn't get a thing to go on, except a servant in the top flat at the Battersea Bridge Road end of the row who said she thought she heard a bump on the roof one night. Asked which night, she couldn't rightly say. Asked if it was Monday night, she thought it very likely. Asked if it mightn't have been in that high wind on Saturday night that blew my chimney-pot off, she couldn't say but what it might have been. Asked if she was sure it was on the roof and not inside the flat, said to be sure they did find a picture tumbled down next morning. Very suggestible girl. I saw your friends, Mr. and Mrs. Appledore, who received me coldly, but could make no definite complaint about Thipps except that his mother dropped her h's, and that he once called on them uninvited, armed with a pamphlet about anti-vivisection. The Indian Colonel on the first floor was loud, but unexpectedly friendly. He gave me Indian curry for supper and some very good whisky, but he's a sort of hermit, and all *he* could tell me was that he couldn't stand Mrs. Appledore."

"Did you get nothing at the house?"

"Only Levy's private diary. I brought it away with me. Here it is. It doesn't tell one much, though. It's full of entries like: 'Tom and Annie to dinner'; and 'My dear wife's birthday; gave her an old opal ring';

'Mr. Arbuthnot dropped in to tea; he wants to marry Rachel, but I should like someone steadier for my treasure.' Still, I thought it would show who came to the house and so on. He evidently wrote it up at night. There's no entry for Monday."

"I expect it'll be useful," said Lord Peter, turning over the pages. "Poor old buffer. I say, I'm not so certain now he was done away with."

He detailed to Mr. Parker his day's work.

"Arbuthnot?" said Parker. "Is that the Arbuthnot of the diary?"

"I suppose so. I hunted him up because I knew he was fond of fooling round the Stock Exchange. As for Milligan, he *looks* all right, but I believe he's pretty ruthless in business and you never can tell. Then there's the red-haired secretary—lightnin' calculator man with a face like a fish, keeps on sayin' nuthin'—got the Tarbaby in his family tree, I should think. Milligan's got a jolly good motive for, at any rate, suspendin' Levy for a few days. Then there's the new man."

"What new man?"

"Ah, that's the letter I mentioned to you. Where did I put it? Here we are. Good parchment paper, printed address of solicitor's office in Salisbury, and postmark to correspond. Very precisely written with a fine nib by an elderly business man of old-fashioned habits."

Parker took the letter and read:

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CRIMPLESHAM AND WICKS,
Solicitors,
MILFORD HILL, SALISBURY,
17 November, 192—.

Sir,

With reference to your advertisement today in the personal column of *The Times*, I am disposed to believe that the eyeglasses and chain in question may be those I lost on the L. B. & S. C. Electric Railway while visiting London last Monday. I left Victoria by the 5.45 train, and did not notice my loss till I arrived at Balham. This indication and the optician's specification of the glasses, which I enclose, should suffice at once as an identification and a guarantee of my bona fides. If the glasses should prove to be mine, I should be greatly obliged to you if you would kindly forward them to me by registered post, as the chain was a present from my daughter, and is one of my dearest possessions.

Thanking you in advance for this kindness, and regretting the trouble to which I shall be putting you, I am,

Yours very truly,
THOS. CRIMPLESHAM

Lord Peter Wimsey,
110, Piccadilly, W.
(Encl.)

"Dear me," said Parker, "this is what you might call unexpected."

"Either it is some extraordinary misunderstanding," said Lord Peter, "or Mr. Crimplesham is a very bold and cunning villain. Or possibly, of course, they are the wrong glasses. We may as well get a ruling on that point at once. I suppose the glasses are at the Yard. I wish you'd just ring 'em up and ask 'em to

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send round an optician's description of them at once—and you might ask at the same time whether it's a very common prescription."

"Right you are," said Parker, and took the receiver off its hook.

"And now," said his friend, when the message was delivered, "just come into the library for a minute."

On the library table, Lord Peter had spread out a series of bromide prints, some dry, some damp, and some but half-washed.

"These little ones are the originals of the photos we've been taking," said Lord Peter, "and these big ones are enlargements all made to precisely the same scale. This one here is the footmark on the linoleum; we'll put that by itself at present. Now these finger-prints can be divided into five lots. I've numbered 'em on the prints—see?—and made a list:

"A. The finger-prints of Levy himself, off his little bedside book and his hair-brush—this and this—you can't mistake the little scar on the thumb.

"B. The smudges made by the gloved fingers of the man who slept in Levy's room on Monday night. They show clearly on the water-bottle and on the boots—superimposed on Levy's. They are very distinct on the boots—surprisingly so for gloved hands, and I deduce that the gloves were rubber ones and had recently been in water.

"Here's another interestin' point. Levy walked in the rain on Monday night, as we know, and these dark marks are mud-splashes. You see they lie *over* Levy's finger-prints in every case. Now see: on this

left boot we find the stranger's thumb-mark *over* the mud on the leather above the heel. That's a funny place to find a thumb-mark on a boot, isn't it? That is, if Levy took off his own boots. But it's the place where you'd expect to see it if somebody forcibly removed his boots for him. Again, most of the stranger's finger-marks come *over* the mud-marks, but here is one splash of mud which comes on top of them again. Which makes me infer that the stranger came back to Park Lane, wearing Levy's boots, in a cab, carriage or car, but that at some point or other he walked a little way—just enough to tread in a puddle and get a splash on the boots. What do you say?"

"Very pretty," said Parker. "A bit intricate, though, and the marks are not all that I could wish a finger-print to be."

"Well, I won't lay too much stress on it. But it fits in with our previous ideas. Now let's turn to:

"C. The prints obligingly left by my own particular villain on the further edge of Thipps's bath, where you spotted them, and I ought to be scourged for not having spotted them. The left hand, you notice, the base of the palm and the fingers, but not the tips, looking as though he had steadied himself on the edge of the bath while leaning down to adjust something at the bottom, the pince-nez perhaps. Gloved, you see, but showing no ridge or seam of any kind—I say rubber, you say rubber. That's that. Now see here:

"D and E come off a visiting-card of mine. There's this thing at the corner, marked F, but that you can disregard; in the original document it's a sticky mark

left by the thumb of the youth who took it from me, after first removing a piece of chewing-gum from his teeth with his finger to tell me that Mr. Milligan might or might not be disengaged. D and E are the thumb-marks of Mr. Milligan and his red-haired secretary. I'm not clear which is which, but I saw the youth with the chewing-gum hand the card to the secretary, and when I got into the inner shrine I saw John P. Milligan standing with it in his hand, so it's one or the other, and for the moment it's immaterial to our purpose which is which. I boned the card from the table when I left.

"Well, now, Parker, here's what's been keeping Bunter and me up till the small hours. I've measured and measured every way backwards and forwards till my head's spinnin', and I've stared till I'm nearly blind, but I'm hanged if I can make my mind up. Question 1. Is C identical with B? Question 2. Is D or E identical with B? There's nothing to go on but the size and shape, of course, and the marks are so faint—what do you think?"

Parker shook his head doubtfully.

"I think E might almost be put out of the question," he said; "it seems such an excessively long and narrow thumb. But I think there is a decided resemblance between the span of B on the water-bottle and C on the bath. And I don't see any reason why D shouldn't be the same as B, only there's so little to judge from."

"Your untutored judgment and my measurements have brought us both to the same conclusion—if you

can call it a conclusion," said Lord Peter, bitterly.

"Another thing," said Parker. "Why on earth should we try to connect B with C? The fact that you and I happen to be friends doesn't make it necessary to conclude that the two cases we happen to be interested in have any organic connection with one another. Why should they? The only person who thinks they have is Sugg, and he's nothing to go by. It would be different if there were any truth in the suggestion that the man in the bath was Levy, but we know for a certainty he wasn't. It's ridiculous to suppose that the same man was employed in committing two totally distinct crimes on the same night, one in Battersea and the other in Park Lane."

"I know," said Wimsey, "though of course we mustn't forget that Levy *was* in Battersea at the time, and now we know he didn't return home at twelve as was supposed, we've no reason to think he ever left Battersea at all."

"True. But there are other places in Battersea besides Thipps's bathroom. And he *wasn't* in Thipps's bathroom. In fact, come to think of it, that's the one place in the universe where we know definitely that he wasn't. So what's Thipps's bath got to do with it?"

"I don't know," said Lord Peter. "Well, perhaps we shall get something better to go on today."

He leaned back in his chair and smoked thoughtfully for some time over the papers which Bunter had marked for him.

"They've got you out in the limelight," he said.

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"Thank Heaven, Sugg hates me too much to give me any publicity. What a dull Agony Column! 'Darling Pipsey—Come back soon to your distracted Popsey'—and the usual young man in need of financial assistance, and the usual injunction to 'Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' Hullo! there's the bell. Oh, it's our answer from Scotland Yard."

The note from Scotland Yard enclosed an optician's specification identical with that sent by Mr. Crimplesham, and added that it was an unusual one, owing to the peculiar strength of the lenses and the marked difference between the sight of the two eyes.

"That's good enough," said Parker.

"Yes," said Wimsey. "Then Possibility No. 3 is knocked on the head. There remain Possibility No. 1: Accident or Misunderstanding, and No. 2: Deliberate Villainy, of a remarkably bold and calculating kind—of a kind, in fact, characteristic of the author or authors of our two problems. Following the methods inculcated at that University of which I have the honour to be a member, we will now examine severally the various suggestions afforded by Possibility No. 2. This Possibility may be again subdivided into two or more Hypotheses. On Hypothesis 1 (strongly advocated by my distinguished colleague Professor Snupshed), the criminal, whom we may designate as X, is not identical with Crimplesham, but is using the name of Crimplesham as his shield, or aegis. This hypothesis may be further subdivided into two alternatives. Alternative A: Crimplesham is an innocent and unconscious accomplice, and X is in his employ-

ment. X writes in Crimplesham's name on Crimplesham's office-paper and obtains that the object in question, i.e., the eyeglasses, be despatched to Crimplesham's address. He is in a position to intercept the parcel before it reaches Crimplesham. The presumption is that X is Crimplesham's charwoman, office-boy, clerk, secretary or porter. This offers a wide field of investigation. The method of inquiry will be to interview Crimplesham and discover whether he sent the letter, and if not, who has access to his correspondence. Alternative B: Crimplesham is under X's influence or in his power, and has been induced to write the letter by (*a*) bribery, (*b*) misrepresentation or (*c*) threats. X may in that case be a persuasive relation or friend, or else a creditor, blackmailer or assassin; Crimplesham, on the other hand, is obviously venal or a fool. The method of inquiry in this case, I would tentatively suggest, is again to interview Crimplesham, put the facts of the case strongly before him, and assure him in the most intimidating terms that he is liable to a prolonged term of penal servitude as an accessory after the fact in the crime of murder—Ah-hem! Trusting, gentlemen, that you have followed me thus far, we will pass to the consideration of Hypothesis No. 2, to which I personally incline, and according to which X is identical with Crimplesham.

"In this case, Crimplesham, who is, in the words of an English classic, a man-of-infinite-resource-and-sagacity, correctly deduces that, of all people, the last whom we shall expect to find answering our adver-

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tisement is the criminal himself. Accordingly, he plays a bold game of bluff. He invents an occasion on which the glasses may very easily have been lost or stolen, and applies for them. If confronted, nobody will be more astonished than he to learn where they were found. He will produce witnesses to prove that he left Victoria at 5.45 and emerged from the train at Balham at the scheduled time, and sat up all Monday night playing chess with a respectable gentleman well known in Balham. In this case, the method of inquiry will be to pump the respectable gentleman in Balham, and if he should happen to be a single gentleman with a deaf housekeeper, it may be no easy matter to impugn the alibi, since, outside detective romances, few ticket-collectors and 'bus-conductors keep an exact remembrance of all the passengers passing between Balham and London on any and every evening of the week.

"Finally, gentlemen, I will frankly point out the weak point of all these hypotheses, namely: that none of them offers any explanation as to why the incriminating article was left so conspicuously on the body in the first instance."

Mr. Parker had listened with commendable patience to this academic exposition.

"Might not X," he suggested, "be an enemy of Crimpleham's, who designed to throw suspicion upon him?"

"He might. In that case he should be easy to discover, since he obviously lives in close proximity to Crimpleham and his glasses, and Crimpleham in fear

of his life will then be a valuable ally for the prosecution."

"How about the first possibility of all, misunderstanding or accident?"

"Well! Well, for purposes of discussion, nothing, because it really doesn't afford any data for discussion."

"In any case," said Parker, "the obvious course appears to be to go to Salisbury."

"That seems indicated," said Lord Peter.

"Very well," said the detective, "is it to be you or me or both of us?"

"It is to be me," said Lord Peter, "and that for two reasons. First, because, if (by Possibility No. 2, Hypothesis 1, Alternative A) Crimplasham is an innocent catspaw, the person who put in the advertisement is the proper person to hand over the property. Secondly, because, if we are to adopt Hypothesis 2, we must not overlook the sinister possibility that Crimplasham-X is laying a careful trap to rid himself of the person who so unwarily advertised in the daily press his interest in the solution of the Battersea Park mystery."

"That appears to me to be an argument for our both going," objected the detective.

"Far from it," said Lord Peter. "Why play into the hands of Crimplasham-X by delivering over to him the only two men in London with the evidence, such as it is, and shall I say the wits, to connect him with the Battersea body?"

"But if we told the Yard where we were going, and

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we both got nobbled," said Mr. Parker, "it would afford strong presumptive evidence of Crimplesham's guilt, and anyhow, if he didn't get hanged for murdering the man in the bath he'd at least get hanged for murdering us."

"Well," said Lord Peter, "if he only murdered me you could still hang him—what's the good of wasting a sound, marriageable young male like yourself? Besides, how about old Levy? If you're incapacitated, do you think anybody else is going to find him?"

"But we could frighten Crimplesham by threatening him with the Yard."

"Well, dash it all, if it comes to that, *I* can frighten him by threatening him with *you*, which, seeing you hold what evidence there is, is much more to the point. And, then, suppose it's a wild-goose chase after all, you'll have wasted time when you might have been getting on with the case. There are several things that need doing."

"Well," said Parker, silenced but reluctant, "why can't I go, in that case?"

"Bosh!" said Lord Peter. "I am retained (by old Mrs. Thipps, for whom I entertain the greatest respect) to deal with this case, and it's only by courtesy I allow you to have anything to do with it."

Mr. Parker groaned.

"Will you at least take Bunter?" he said.

"In deference to your feelings," replied Lord Peter, "I will take Bunter, though he could be far more usefully employed taking photographs or overhauling

my wardrobe. When is there a good train to Salisbury, Bunter?"

"There is an excellent train at 10.50, my lord."

"Kindly make arrangements to catch it," said Lord Peter, throwing off his bath-robe and trailing away with it into his bedroom. "And, Parker—if you have nothing else to do you might get hold of Levy's secretary and look into that little matter of the Peruvian oil."

Lord Peter took with him, for light reading in the train, Sir Reuben Levy's diary. It was a simple, and in the light of recent facts, rather a pathetic document. The terrible fighter of the Stock Exchange, who could with one nod set the surly bear dancing, or bring the savage bull to feed out of his hand, whose breath devastated whole districts with famine or swept financial potentates from their seats, was revealed in private life as kindly, domestic, innocently proud of himself and his belongings, confiding, generous and a little dull. His own small economies were duly chronicled side by side with extravagant presents to his wife and daughter. Small incidents of household routine appeared, such as: "Man came to mend the conservatory roof," or "The new butler (Simpson) has arrived, recommended by the Goldbergs. I think he will be satisfactory." All visitors and entertainments were duly entered, from a very magnificent lunch to Lord Dewsbury, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Jabez K. Wort, the American plenipotentiary, through a series of diplomatic

dinners to eminent financiers, down to intimate family gatherings of persons designated by Christian names or nicknames. About May there came a mention of Lady Levy's nerves, and further reference was made to the subject in subsequent months. In September it was stated that "Freke came to see my dear wife and advised complete rest and change of scene. She thinks of going abroad with Rachel." The name of the famous nerve-specialist occurred as a diner or luncher about once a month, and it came into Lord Peter's mind that Freke would be a good person to consult about Levy himself. "People sometimes tell things to the doctor," he murmured to himself. "And, by Jove! if Levy was simply going round to see Freke on Monday night, that rather disposes of the Battersea incident, doesn't it?" He made a note to look up Sir Julian and turned on further. On September 18th, Lady Levy and her daughter had left for the south of France. Then suddenly, under the date October 5th, Lord Peter found what he was looking for: "Goldberg, Skriner and Milligan to dinner."

There was the evidence that Milligan had been in that house. There had been a formal entertainment—a meeting as of two duellists shaking hands before the fight. Skriner was a well-known picture-dealer; Lord Peter imagined an after-dinner excursion upstairs to see the two Corots in the drawing-room, and the portrait of the oldest Levy girl, who had died at the age of sixteen. It was by Augustus John, and hung in the bedroom. The name of the red-haired secretary was nowhere mentioned, unless the initial S., occur-

ring in another entry, referred to him. Throughout September and October, Anderson (of Wyndham's) had been a frequent visitor.

Lord Peter shook his head over the diary, and turned to the consideration of the Battersea Park mystery. Whereas in the Levy affair it was easy enough to supply a motive for the crime, if crime it were, and the difficulty was to discover the method of its carrying out and the whereabouts of the victim, in the other case the chief obstacle to inquiry was the entire absence of any imaginable motive. It was odd that, although the papers had carried news of the affair from one end of the country to the other and a description of the body had been sent to every police station in the country, nobody had as yet come forward to identify the mysterious occupant of Mr. Thipps's bath. It was true that the description, which mentioned the clean-shaven chin, elegantly cut hair and the pince-nez, was rather misleading, but on the other hand, the police had managed to discover the number of molars missing, and the height, complexion and other data were correctly enough stated, as also the date at which death had presumably occurred. It seemed, however, as though the man had melted out of society without leaving a gap or so much as a ripple. Assigning a motive for the murder of a person without relations or antecedents or even clothes is like trying to visualize the fourth dimension—admirable exercise for the imagination, but arduous and inconclusive. Even if the day's interview should disclose black spots in the past or present of Mr. Crimple-

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sham, how were they to be brought into connection with a person apparently without a past, and whose present was confined to the narrow limits of a bath and a police mortuary?

"Bunter," said Lord Peter, "I beg that in the future you will restrain me from starting two hares at once. These cases are gettin' to be a strain on my constitution. One hare has nowhere to run from, and the other has nowhere to run to. It's a kind of mental D.T., Bunter. When this is over I shall turn pussy-foot, forswear the police news, and take to an emollient diet of the works of the late Charles Garvice."

It was its comparative proximity to Milford Hill that induced Lord Peter to lunch at the Minster Hotel rather than at the White Hart or some other more picturesquely situated hostel. It was not a lunch calculated to cheer his mind; as in all Cathedral cities, the atmosphere of the Close pervades every nook and corner of Salisbury, and no food in that city but seems faintly flavoured with prayer-books. As he sat sadly consuming that impassive pale substance known to the English as "cheese" unqualified (for there are cheeses which go openly by their names, as Stilton, Camembert, Gruyère, Wensleydale or Gorgonzola, but "cheese" is cheese and everywhere the same), he inquired of the waiter the whereabouts of Mr. Crimpham's office.

The waiter directed him to a house rather further up the street on the opposite side, adding: "But any-

body'll tell you, sir; Mr. Crimplesham's very well known hereabouts."

"He's a good solicitor, I suppose?" said Lord Peter.

"Oh, yes, sir," said the waiter, "you couldn't do better than trust to Mr. Crimplesham, sir. There's folk say he's old-fashioned, but I'd rather have my little bits of business done by Mr. Crimplesham than by one of these fly-away young men. Not but what Mr. Crimplesham'll be retiring soon, sir, I don't doubt, for he must be close on eighty, sir, if he's a day, but then there's young Mr. Wicks to carry on the business, and he's a very nice, steady-like young gentleman."

"Is Mr. Crimplesham really as old as that?" said Lord Peter. "Dear me! He must be very active for his years. A friend of mine was doing business with him in town last week."

"Wonderful active, sir," agreed the waiter, "and with his game leg, too, you'd be surprised. But there, sir, I often think when a man's once past a certain age, the older he grows the tougher he gets, and women the same or more so."

"Very likely," said Lord Peter, calling up and dismissing the mental picture of a gentleman of eighty with a game leg carrying a dead body over the roof of a Battersea flat at midnight. "'He's tough, sir, tough, is old Joey Bagstock, tough and devilish sly,'" he added, thoughtlessly.

"Indeed, sir?" said the waiter. "I couldn't say, I'm sure."

"I beg your pardon," said Lord Peter; "I was quoting poetry. Very silly of me. I got the habit at my mother's knee and I can't break myself of it."

"No, sir," said the waiter, pocketing a liberal tip. "Thank you very much, sir. You'll find the house easy. Just afore you come to Penny-farthing Street, sir, about two turnings off, on the right-hand side opposite."

"Afraid that disposes of Crimplesham-X," said Lord Peter. "I'm rather sorry; he was a fine sinister figure as I had pictured him. Still, his may yet be the brain behind the hands—the aged spider sitting invisible in the centre of the vibrating web, you know, Bunter."

"Yes, my lord," said Bunter. They were walking up the street together.

"There is the office over the way," pursued Lord Peter. "I think, Bunter, you might step into this little shop and purchase a sporting paper, and if I do not emerge from the villain's lair—say within three-quarters of an hour, you may take such steps as your perspicuity may suggest."

Mr. Bunter turned into the shop as desired, and Lord Peter walked across and rang the lawyer's bell with decision.

"The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is my long suit here, I fancy," he murmured, and when the door was opened by a clerk he delivered over his card with an unflinching air.

He was ushered immediately into a confidential-

looking office, obviously furnished in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, and never altered since. A lean, frail-looking old gentleman rose briskly from his chair as he entered and limped forward to meet him.

"My dear sir," exclaimed the lawyer, "how extremely good of you to come in person! Indeed, I am ashamed to have given you so much trouble. I trust you were passing this way, and that my glasses have not put you to any great inconvenience. Pray take a seat, Lord Peter." He peered gratefully at the young man over a pince-nez obviously the fellow of that now adorning a dossier in Scotland Yard.

Lord Peter sat down. The lawyer sat down. Lord Peter picked up a glass paper-weight from the desk and weighed it thoughtfully in his hand. Subconsciously he noted what an admirable set of fingerprints he was leaving upon it. He replaced it with precision on the exact centre of a pile of letters.

"It's quite all right," said Lord Peter. "I was here on business. Very happy to be of service to you. Very awkward to lose one's glasses, Mr. Crimplesham."

"Yes," said the lawyer, "I assure you I feel quite lost without them. I have this pair, but they do not fit my nose so well—besides, that chain has a great sentimental value for me. I was terribly distressed on arriving at Balham to find that I had lost them. I made inquiries of the railway, but to no purpose. I feared they had been stolen. There were such crowds at Victoria, and the carriage was packed with people

all the way to Balham. Did you come across them in the train?"

"Well, no," said Lord Peter, "I found them in rather an unexpected place. Do you mind telling me if you recognized any of your fellow-travellers on that occasion?"

The lawyer stared at him.

"Not a soul," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Well," said Lord Peter, "I thought perhaps the—the person with whom I found them might have taken them for a joke."

The lawyer looked puzzled.

"Did the person claim to be an acquaintance of mine?" he inquired. "I know practically nobody in London, except the friend with whom I was staying in Balham, Dr. Philpots, and I should be very greatly surprised at his practising a jest upon me. He knew very well how distressed I was at the loss of the glasses. My business was to attend a meeting of shareholders in Medlicott's Bank, but the other gentlemen present were all personally unknown to me, and I cannot think that any of them would take so great a liberty. In any case," he added, "as the glasses are here, I will not inquire too closely into the manner of their restoration. I am deeply obliged to you for your trouble."

Lord Peter hesitated.

"Pray forgive my seeming inquisitiveness," he said, "but I must ask you another question. It sounds rather melodramatic, I'm afraid, but it's this. Are you aware that you have any enemy—anyone, I

mean, who would profit by your—er—decease or disgrace?”

Mr. Crimplesham sat frozen into stony surprise and disapproval.

“May I ask the meaning of this extraordinary question?” he inquired stiffly.

“Well,” said Lord Peter, “the circumstances are a little unusual. You may recollect that my advertisement was addressed to the jeweller who sold the chain.”

“That surprised me at the time,” said Mr. Crimplesham, “but I begin to think your advertisement and your behaviour are all of a piece.”

“They are,” said Lord Peter. “As a matter of fact I did not expect the owner of the glasses to answer my advertisement. Mr. Crimplesham, you have no doubt read what the papers have to say about the Battersea Park mystery. Your glasses are the pair that was found on the body, and they are now in the possession of the police at Scotland Yard, as you may see by this.” He placed the specification of the glasses and the official note before Crimplesham.

“Good God!” exclaimed the lawyer. He glanced at the paper, and then looked narrowly at Lord Peter.

“Are you yourself connected with the police?” he inquired.

“Not officially,” said Lord Peter. “I am investigating the matter privately, in the interests of one of the parties.”

Mr. Crimplesham rose to his feet.

"My good man," he said, "this is a very impudent attempt, but blackmail is an indictable offence, and I advise you to leave my office before you commit yourself." He rang the bell.

"I was afraid you'd take it like that," said Lord Peter. "It looks as though this ought to have been my friend Detective Parker's job, after all." He laid Parker's card on the table beside the specification, and added: "If you should wish to see me again, Mr. Crimplesham, before tomorrow morning, you will find me at the Minster Hotel."

Mr. Crimplesham disdained to reply further than to direct the clerk who entered to "show this person out."

In the entrance Lord Peter brushed against a tall young man who was just coming in, and who stared at him with surprised recognition. His face, however, aroused no memories in Lord Peter's mind, and that baffled nobleman, calling out Bunter from the newspaper shop, departed to his hotel to get a trunk-call through to Parker.

Meanwhile, in the office, the meditations of the indignant Mr. Crimplesham were interrupted by the entrance of his junior partner.

"I say," said the latter gentleman, "has somebody done something really wicked at last? Whatever brings such a distinguished amateur of crime on our sober doorstep?"

"I have been the victim of a vulgar attempt at

blackmail," said the lawyer; "an individual passing himself off as Lord Peter Wimsey—"

"But that *is* Lord Peter Wimsey," said Mr. Wicks, "there's no mistaking him. I saw him give evidence in the Attenbury emerald case. He's a big little pot in his way, you know, and goes fishing with the head of Scotland Yard."

"Oh, dear," said Mr. Crimplesham.

Fate arranged that the nerves of Mr. Crimplesham should be tried that afternoon. When, escorted by Mr. Wicks, he arrived at the Minster Hotel, he was informed by the porter that Lord Peter Wimsey had strolled out, mentioning that he thought of attending Evensong. "But his man is here, sir," he added, "if you'd like to leave a message."

Mr. Wicks thought that on the whole it would be well to leave a message. Mr. Bunter, on inquiry, was found to be sitting by the telephone, waiting for a trunk-call. As Mr. Wicks addressed him the bell rang, and Mr. Bunter, politely excusing himself, took down the receiver.

"Hullo!" he said. "Is that Mr. Parker? Oh, thanks! Exchange! Exchange! Sorry, can you put me through to Scotland Yard? Excuse me, gentlemen, keeping you waiting.—Exchange! all right—Scotland Yard—Hullo! Is that Scotland Yard?—Is Detective Parker round there?—Can I speak to him?—I shall have done in a moment, gentlemen.—Hullo! is that you, Mr. Parker? Lord Peter would be much obliged if you could find it convenient to step down to Salisbury, sir.

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Oh, no, sir, he's in excellent health, sir—just stepped round to hear Evensong, sir—oh, no, I think tomorrow morning would do excellently, sir, thank you, sir.”

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS, IN FACT, INCONVENIENT FOR MR. PARKER TO leave London. He had had to go and see Lady Levy towards the end of the morning, and subsequently his plans for the day had been thrown out of gear and his movements delayed by the discovery that the adjourned inquest of Mr. Thipps's unknown visitor was to be held that afternoon, since nothing very definite seemed forthcoming from Inspector Sugg's inquiries. Jury and witnesses had been convened accordingly for three o'clock. Mr. Parker might altogether have missed the event, had he not run against Sugg that morning at the Yard and extracted the information from him as one would a reluctant tooth. Inspector Sugg, indeed, considered Mr. Parker rather interfering; moreover, he was hand-in-glove with Lord Peter Wimsey, and Inspector Sugg had no words for the interferingness of Lord Peter. He could not, however, when directly questioned, deny that there was to be an inquest that afternoon, nor could he prevent Mr. Parker from enjoying the inalienable right of any interested British citizen to be present. At a little before three, therefore, Mr. Parker was in his place, and amusing himself with watching the efforts of those persons who arrived after the room was packed to insinuate, bribe or bully themselves into a position of vantage. The Coroner, a medical man of

precise habits and unimaginative aspect, arrived punctually, and looking peevishly round at the crowded assembly, directed all the windows to be opened, thus letting in a stream of drizzling fog upon the heads of the unfortunates on that side of the room. This caused a commotion and some expressions of disapproval, checked sternly by the Coroner, who said that with the influenza about again an un-ventilated room was a death-trap; that anybody who chose to object to open windows had the obvious remedy of leaving the court, and further, that if any disturbance was made he would clear the court. He then took a Formamint lozenge, and proceeded, after the usual preliminaries, to call up fourteen good and lawful persons and swear them diligently to inquire and a true presentment make of all matters touching the death of the gentleman with the pince-nez and to give a true verdict according to the evidence, so help them God. When an expostulation by a woman juror—an elderly lady in spectacles who kept a sweet-shop, and appeared to wish she was back there—had been summarily quashed by the Coroner, the jury departed to view the body. Mr. Parker gazed round again and identified the unhappy Mr. Thipps and the girl Gladys led into an adjoining room under the grim guard of the police. They were soon followed by a gaunt old lady in a bonnet and mantle. With her, in a wonderful fur coat and a motor bonnet of fascinating construction, came the Dowager Duchess of Denver, her quick, dark eyes darting hither and thither about the crowd. The next moment they had

lighted on Mr. Parker, who had several times visited the Dower House, and she nodded to him, and spoke to a policeman. Before long, a way opened magically through the press, and Mr. Parker found himself accommodated with a front seat just behind the Duchess, who greeted him charmingly, and said: "What's happened to poor Peter?" Parker began to explain, and the Coroner glanced irritably in their direction. Somebody went up and whispered in his ear, at which he coughed, and took another Formamint.

"We came up by car," said the Duchess—"so tiresome—such bad roads between Denver and Gunbury St. Walters—and there were people coming to lunch—I had to put them off—I couldn't let the old lady go alone, could I? By the way, such an odd thing's happened about the Church Restoration Fund—the Vicar—oh, dear, here are these people coming back again; well, I'll tell you afterwards—do look at that woman looking shocked, and the girl in tweeds trying to look as if she sat on undraped gentlemen every day of her life—I don't mean that—corpses of course—but one finds oneself being so Elizabethan nowadays—what an awful little man the coroner is, isn't he? He's looking daggers at me—do you think he'll dare to clear me out of the court or commit me for what-you-may-call-it?"

The first part of the evidence was not of great interest to Mr. Parker. The wretched Mr. Thipps, who had caught cold in gaol, deposed in an unhappy croak to having discovered the body when he went in to take his bath at eight o'clock. He had had such a

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shock, he had to sit down and send the girl for brandy. He had never seen the deceased before. He had no idea how he came there.

Yes, he had been in Manchester the day before. He had arrived at St. Pancras at ten o'clock. He had cloak-roomed his bag. At this point Mr. Thipps became very red, unhappy and confused, and glanced nervously about the court.

"Now, Mr. Thipps," said the Coroner, briskly, "we must have your movements quite clear. You must appreciate the importance of the matter. You have chosen to give evidence, which you need not have done, but having done so, you will find it best to be perfectly explicit."

"Yes," said Mr. Thipps faintly.

"Have you cautioned this witness, officer?" inquired the Coroner, turning sharply to Inspector Sugg.

The Inspector replied that he had told Mr. Thipps that anything he said might be used agin' him at his trial. Mr. Thipps became ashy, and said in a bleating voice that he 'adn't—hadn't meant to do anything that wasn't right.

This remark produced a mild sensation, and the Coroner became even more acidulated in manner than before.

"Is anybody representing Mr. Thipps?" he asked, irritably. "No? Did you not explain to him that he could—that he *ought* to be represented? You did not? Really, Inspector! Did you not know, Mr. Thipps, that you had a right to be legally represented?"

Mr. Thipps clung to a chair-back for support, and said, "No," in a voice barely audible.

"It is incredible," said the Coroner, "that so-called educated people should be so ignorant of the legal procedure of their own country. This places us in a very awkward position. I doubt, Inspector, whether I should permit the prisoner—Mr. Thipps—to give evidence at all. It is a delicate position."

The perspiration stood on Mrs. Thipps's forehead.

"Save us from our friends," whispered the Duchess to Parker. "If that cough-drop-devouring creature had openly instructed those fourteen people—and what unfinished-looking faces they have—so characteristic, I always think, of the lower middle-class, rather like sheep, or calves' head (boiled, I mean), to bring in wilful murder against the poor little man, he couldn't have made himself plainer."

"He can't let him incriminate himself, you know," said Parker.

"Stuff!" said the Duchess. "How could the man incriminate himself when he never did anything in his life? You men never think of anything but your red tape."

Meanwhile Mr. Thipps, wiping his brow with a handkerchief, had summoned up courage. He stood up with a kind of weak dignity, like a small white rabbit brought to bay.

"I would rather tell you," he said, "though it's reelly very unpleasant for a man in my position. But I reelly couldn't have it thought for a moment that I'd committed this dreadful crime. I assure you,

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gentlemen, I *couldn't* bear that. No. I'd rather tell you the truth, though I'm afraid it places me in rather a—well, I'll tell you."

"You fully understand the gravity of making such a statement, Mr. Thipps," said the Coroner.

"Quite," said Mr. Thipps. "It's all right—I—might I have a drink of water?"

"Take your time," said the Coroner, at the same time robbing his remark of all conviction by an impatient glance at his watch.

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Thipps. "Well, then, it's true I got to St. Pancras at ten. But there was a man in the carriage with me. He'd got in at Leicester. I didn't recognise him at first, but he turned out to be an old school-fellow of mine."

"What was this gentleman's name?" inquired the Coroner, his pencil poised.

Mr. Thipps shrank together visibly.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that," he said. "You see—that is, you *will* see—it would get him into trouble, and I couldn't do that—no, I reelly couldn't do that, not if my life depended on it. No!" he added, as the ominous pertinence of the last phrase smote upon him, "I'm sure I couldn't do that."

"Well, well," said the Coroner.

The Duchess leaned over to Parker again. "I'm beginning quite to admire the little man," she said.

Mr. Thipps resumed.

"When we got to St. Pancras I was going home, but my friend said no. We hadn't met for a long time and we ought to—to make a night of it, was his

expression. I fear I was weak, and let him overpersuade me to accompany him to one of his haunts. I use the word advisedly," said Mr. Thipps, "and I assure you, sir, that if I had known beforehand where we were going I never would have set foot in the place.

"I cloak-roomed my bag, for he did not like the notion of our being encumbered with it, and we got into a taxicab and drove to the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. We then walked a little way, and turned into a side street (I do not recollect which) where there was an open door, with the light shining out. There was a man at a counter, and my friend bought some tickets, and I heard the man at the counter say something to him about 'Your friend,' meaning me, and my friend said, 'Oh, yes, he's been here before, haven't you, Alf?' (which was what they called me at school), though I assure you, sir"—here Mr. Thipps grew very earnest—"I never had, and nothing in the world should induce me to go to such a place again.

"Well, we went down into a room underneath, where there were drinks, and my friend had several, and made me take one or two—though I am an abstemious man as a rule—and he talked to some other men and girls who were there—a very vulgar set of people, I thought them, though I wouldn't say but what some of the young ladies were nice-looking enough. One of them sat on my friend's knee and called him a slow old thing, and told him to come on—so we went into another room, where there were a

lot of people dancing all these up-to-date dances. My friend went and danced, and I sat on a sofa. One of the young ladies came up to me and said, didn't I dance, and I said 'No,' so she said wouldn't I stand her a drink then. 'You'll stand us a drink then, darling,' that was what she said, and I said, 'Wasn't it after hours?' and she said that didn't matter. So I ordered the drink—a gin and bitters it was—for I didn't like not to, the young lady seemed to expect it of me and I felt it wouldn't be gentlemanly to refuse when she asked. But it went against my conscience—such a young girl as she was—and she put her arm round my neck afterwards and kissed me just like as if she was paying for the drink—and it reelly went to my 'eart," said Mr. Thipps, a little ambiguously, but with uncommon emphasis.

Here somebody at the back said, "Cheer-oh!" and a sound was heard as of the noisy smacking of lips.

"Remove the person who made that improper noise," said the Coroner, with great indignation. "Go on, please, Mr. Thipps."

"Well," said Mr. Thipps, "about half-past twelve, as I should reckon, things began to get a bit lively, and I was looking for my friend to say good-night, not wishing to stay longer, as you will understand, when I saw him with one of the young ladies, and they seemed to be getting on altogether too well, if you follow me, my friend pulling the ribbons off her shoulder and the young lady laughing—and so on," said Mr. Thipps, hurriedly, "so I thought I'd just slip quietly out, when I heard a scuffle and a shout—and

before I knew what was happening there were half-a-dozen policemen in, and the lights went out, and everybody stampeding and shouting—quite horrid, it was. I was knocked down in the rush, and hit my head a nasty knock on a chair—that was where I got that bruise they asked me about—and I was dreadfully afraid I'd never get away and it would all come out, and perhaps my photograph in the papers, when someone caught hold of me—I think it was the young lady I'd given the gin and bitters to—and she said, 'This way,' and pushed me along a passage and out at the back somewhere. So I ran through some streets, and found myself in Goodge Street, and there I got a taxi and came home. I saw the account of the raid afterwards in the papers, and saw my friend had escaped, and so, as it wasn't the sort of thing I wanted made public, and I didn't want to get him into difficulties, I just said nothing. But that's the truth."

"Well, Mr. Thipps," said the Coroner, "we shall be able to substantiate a certain amount of this story. Your friend's name—"

"No," said Mr. Thipps, stoutly, "not on any account."

"Very good," said the Coroner. "Now, can you tell us what time you did get in?"

"About half-past one, I should think. Though reelly, I was so upset—"

"Quite so. Did you go straight to bed?"

"Yes, I took my sandwich and glass of milk first. I thought it might settle my inside, so to speak," added the witness, apologetically, "not being accus-

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tomed to alcohol so late at night and on an empty stomach, as you may say."

"Quite so. Nobody sat up for you?"

"Nobody."

"How long did you take getting to bed first and last?"

Mr. Thipps thought it might have been half-an-hour.

"Did you visit the bathroom before turning in?"

"No."

"And you heard nothing in the night?"

"No. I fell fast asleep. I was rather agitated, so I took a little dose to make me sleep, and what with being so tired and the milk and the dose, I just tumbled right off and didn't wake till Gladys called me."

Further questioning elicited little from Mr. Thipps. Yes, the bathroom window had been open when he went in in the morning, he was sure of that, and he had spoken very sharply to the girl about it. He was ready to answer any questions; he would be only too 'appy—happy to have this dreadful affair sifted to the bottom.

Gladys Horrocks stated that she had been in Mr. Thipps's employment about three months. Her previous employers would speak to her character. It was her duty to make the round of the flat at night, when she had seen Mrs. Thipps to bed at ten. Yes, she remembered doing so on Monday evening. She had looked into all the rooms. Did she recollect shutting the bathroom window that night? Well, no, she couldn't swear to it, not in particular, but when Mr.

Thipps called her into the bathroom in the morning it certainly *was* open. She had not been into the bathroom before Mr. Thipps went in. Well, yes, it had happened that she had left that window open before, when anyone had been 'aving a bath in the evening and 'ad left the blind down. Mrs. Thipps 'ad 'ad a bath on Monday evening, Mondays was one of her regular bath nights. She was very much afraid she 'adn't shut the window on Monday night, though she wished her 'ead 'ad been cut off afore she'd been so forgetful.

Here the witness burst into tears and was given some water, while the Coroner refreshed himself with a third lozenge.

Recovering, witness stated that she had certainly looked into all the rooms before going to bed. No, it was quite impossible for a body to be 'idden in the flat without her seeing of it. She 'ad been in the kitchen all evening, and there wasn't 'ardly room to keep the best dinner service there, let alone a body. Old Mrs. Thipps sat in the drawing-room. Yes, she was sure she'd been into the dining-room. How? Because she put Mr. Thipps's milk and sandwiches there ready for him. There had been nothing in there—that she could swear to. Nor yet in her own bedroom, nor in the 'all. Had she searched the bedroom cupboard and the box-room? Well, no, not to say searched; she wasn't use to searchin' people's 'ouses for skelintons every night. So that a man might have concealed himself in the box-room or a wardrobe? She supposed he might.

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In reply to a woman juror—well, yes, she was walking out with a young man. Williams was his name, Bill Williams,—well, yes, William Williams, if they insisted. He was a glazier by profession. Well, yes, he 'ad been in the flat sometimes. Well, she supposed you might say he was acquainted with the flat. Had she ever—no, she 'adn't, and if she'd thought such a question was going to be put to a respectable girl she wouldn't 'ave offered to give evidence. The vicar of St. Mary's would speak to her character and to Mr. Williams's. Last time Mr. Williams was at the flat was a fortnight ago.

Well, no, it wasn't exactly the last time she 'ad seen Mr. Williams. Well, yes, the last time was Monday—well, yes, Monday night. Well, if she must tell the truth, she must. Yes, the officer had cautioned her, but there wasn't any 'arm in it, and it was better to lose her place than to be 'ung, though it was a cruel shame a girl couldn't 'ave a bit of fun without a nasty corpse comin' in through the window to get 'er into difficulties. After she 'ad put Mrs. Thipps to bed, she 'ad slipped out to go to the Plumbers' and Glaziers' Ball at the "Black Faced Ram." Mr. Williams 'ad met 'er and brought 'er back. 'E could testify to where she'd been and that there wasn't no 'arm in it. She'd left before the end of the ball. It might 'ave been two o'clock when she got back. She'd got the keys of the flat from Mrs. Thipps's drawer when Mrs. Thipps wasn't looking. She 'ad asked leave to go, but couldn't get it, along of Mr. Thipps bein' away that night. She was bitterly sorry she 'ad be'aved so, and she was

sure she'd been punished for it. She had 'eard nothing suspicious when she came in. She had gone straight to bed without looking round the flat. She wished she were dead.

No, Mr. and Mrs. Thipps didn't 'ardly ever 'ave any visitors; they kep' themselves very retired. She had found the outside door bolted that morning as usual. She wouldn't never believe any 'arm of Mr. Thipps. Thank you, Miss Horrocks. Call Georgiana Thipps, and the Coroner thought we had better light the gas.

The examination of Mrs. Thipps provided more entertainment than enlightenment, affording as it did an excellent example of the game called "cross questions and crooked answers." After fifteen minutes' suffering, both in voice and temper, the Coroner abandoned the struggle, leaving the lady with the last word.

"You needn't try to bully me, young man," said that octogenarian with spirit, "settin' there spoilin' your stomach with them nasty jujubes."

At this point a young man arose in court and demanded to give evidence. Having explained that he was William Williams, glazier, he was sworn, and corroborated the evidence of Gladys Horrocks in the matter of her presence at the "Black Faced Ram" on the Monday night. They had returned to the flat rather before two, he thought, but certainly later than 1.30. He was sorry that he had persuaded Miss Horrocks to come out with him when she didn't

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ought. He had observed nothing of a suspicious nature in Prince of Wales Road at either visit.

Inspector Sugg gave evidence of having been called in at about half-past eight on Monday morning. He had considered the girl's manner to be suspicious and had arrested her. On later information, leading him to suspect that the deceased might have been murdered that night, he had arrested Mr. Thipps. He had found no trace of breaking into the flat. There were marks on the bathroom window-sill which pointed to somebody having got in that way. There were no ladder marks or footmarks in the yard; the yard was paved with asphalt. He had examined the roof, but found nothing on the roof. In his opinion the body had been brought into the flat previously and concealed till the evening by someone who had then gone out during the night by the bathroom window, with the connivance of the girl. In that case, why should not the girl have let the person out by the door? Well, it might have been so. Had he found traces of a body or a man or both having been hidden in the flat? He found nothing to show that they might *not* have been so concealed. What was the evidence that led him to suppose that the death had occurred that night?

At this point Inspector Sugg appeared uneasy, and endeavoured to retire upon his professional dignity. On being pressed, however, he admitted that the evidence in question had come to nothing.

One of the jurors: Was it the case that any finger-marks had been left by the criminal?

Some marks had been found on the bath, but the criminal had worn gloves.

The Coroner: Do you draw any conclusion from this fact as to the experience of the criminal?

Inspector Sugg: Looks as if he was an old hand, sir.

The Juror: Is that very consistent with the charge against Alfred Thipps, Inspector?

The Inspector was silent.

The Coroner: In the light of the evidence which you have just heard, do you still press the charge against Alfred Thipps and Gladys Horrocks?

Inspector Sugg: I consider the whole set-out highly suspicious. Thipps's story isn't corroborated, and as for the girl Horrocks, how do we know this Williams ain't in it as well?

William Williams: Now, you drop that. I can bring a 'undred witnesses—

The Coroner: Silence, if you please. I am surprised, Inspector, that you should make this suggestion in that manner. It is highly improper. By the way, can you tell us whether a police raid was actually carried out on the Monday night on any Night Club in the neighbourhood of St. Giles's Circus?

Inspector Sugg (sulkily): I believe there was something of the sort.

The Coroner: You will, no doubt, inquire into the matter. I seem to recollect having seen some mention of it in the newspapers. Thank you, Inspector, that will do.

Several witnesses having appeared and testified to the characters of Mr. Thipps and Gladys Horrocks,

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the Coroner stated his intention of proceeding to the medical evidence.

"Sir Julian Freke."

There was considerable stir in the court as the great specialist walked up to give evidence. He was not only a distinguished man, but a striking figure, with his wide shoulders, upright carriage and leonine head. His manner as he kissed the Book presented to him with the usual deprecatory mumble by the Coroner's officer, was that of a St. Paul condescending to humour the timid mumbo-jumbo of superstitious Corinthians.

"So handsome, I always think," whispered the Duchess to Mr. Parker; "just exactly like William Morris, with that bush of hair and beard and those exciting eyes looking out of it—so splendid, these dear men always devoted to something or other—not but what I think socialism is a mistake—of course it works with all those nice people, so good and happy in art linen and the weather always perfect—Morris, I mean, you know—but so difficult in real life. Science is different—I'm sure if I had nerves I should go to Sir Julian just to look at him—eyes like that give one something to think about, and that's what most of these people want, only I never had any—nerves, I mean. Don't you think so?"

"You are Sir Julian Freke," said the Coroner, "and live at St. Luke's House, Prince of Wales Road, Battersea, where you exercise a general direction over the surgical side of St. Luke's Hospital?"

Sir Julian assented briefly to this definition of his personality.

"You were the first medical man to see the deceased?"

"I was."

"And you have since conducted an examination in collaboration with Dr. Grimbold of Scotland Yard?"

"I have."

"You are in agreement as to the cause of death?"

"Generally speaking, yes."

"Will you communicate your impressions to the Jury?"

"I was engaged in research work in the dissecting room at St. Luke's Hospital at about nine o'clock on Monday morning, when I was informed that Inspector Sugg wished to see me. He told me that the dead body of a man had been discovered under mysterious circumstances at 59 Queen Caroline Mansions. He asked me whether it could be supposed to be a joke perpetrated by any of the medical students at the hospital. I was able to assure him, by an examination of the hospital's books, that there was no subject missing from the dissecting room."

"Who would be in charge of such bodies?"

"William Watts, the dissecting-room attendant."

"Is William Watts present?" inquired the Coroner of the officer.

William Watts was present, and could be called if the Coroner thought it necessary.

"I suppose no dead body would be delivered to the hospital without your knowledge, Sir Julian?"

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"Certainly not."

"Thank you. Will you proceed with your statement?"

"Inspector Sugg then asked me whether I would send a medical man round to view the body. I said that I would go myself."

"Why did you do that?"

"I confess to my share of ordinary human curiosity, Mr. Coroner."

Laughter from a medical student at the back of the room.

"On arriving at the flat I found the deceased lying on his back in the bath. I examined him, and came to the conclusion that death had been caused by a blow on the back of the neck, dislocating the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae, bruising the spinal cord and producing internal haemorrhage and partial paralysis of the brain. I judged the deceased to have been dead at least twelve hours, possibly more. I observed no other sign of violence of any kind upon the body. Deceased was a strong, well-nourished man of about fifty to fifty-five years of age."

"In your opinion, could the blow have been self-inflicted?"

"Certainly not. It had been made with a heavy, blunt instrument from behind, with great force and considerable judgment. It is quite impossible that it was self-inflicted."

"Could it have been the result of an accident?"

"That is possible, of course."

"If, for example, the deceased had been looking out

of the window, and the sash had shut violently down upon him?"

"No; in that case there would have been signs of strangulation and a bruise upon the throat as well."

"But deceased might have been killed through a heavy weight accidentally falling upon him?"

"He might."

"Was death instantaneous, in your opinion?"

"It is difficult to say. Such a blow might very well cause death instantaneously, or the patient might linger in a partially paralyzed condition for some time. In the present case I should be disposed to think that deceased might have lingered for some hours. I base my decision upon the condition of the brain revealed at the autopsy. I may say, however, that Dr. Grimbold and I are not in complete agreement on the point."

"I understand that a suggestion has been made as to the identification of the deceased. *You* are not in a position to identify him?"

"Certainly not. I never saw him before. The suggestion to which you refer is a preposterous one, and ought never to have been made. I was not aware until this morning that it had been made; had it been made to me earlier, I should have known how to deal with it, and I should like to express my strong disapproval of the unnecessary shock and distress inflicted upon a lady with whom I have the honour to be acquainted."

The Coroner: It was not my fault, Sir Julian; I had nothing to do with it; I agree with you that it was unfortunate you were not consulted.

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The reporters scribbled busily, and the court asked each other what was meant, while the jury tried to look as if they knew already.

"In the matter of the eyeglasses found upon the body, Sir Julian. Do these give any indication to a medical man?"

"They are somewhat unusual lenses; an oculist would be able to speak more definitely, but I will say for myself that I should have expected them to belong to an older man than the deceased."

"Speaking as a physician, who has had many opportunities of observing the human body, did you gather anything from the appearance of the deceased as to his personal habits?"

"I should say that he was a man in easy circumstances, but who had only recently come into money. His teeth are in a bad state, and his hands shows signs of recent manual labour."

"An Australian colonist, for instance, who had made money?"

"Something of that sort; of course, I could not say positively."

"Of course not. Thank you, Sir Julian."

Dr. Grimbold, called, corroborated his distinguished colleague in every particular, except that, in his opinion, death had not occurred for several days after the blow. It was with the greatest hesitancy that he ventured to differ from Sir Julian Freke, and he might be wrong. It was difficult to tell in any case, and when he saw the body, deceased had been dead at least twenty-four hours, in his opinion.

Inspector Sugg, recalled. Would he tell the jury what steps had been taken to identify the deceased?

A description had been sent to every police station and had been inserted in all the newspapers. In view of the suggestion made by Sir Julian Freke, had inquiries been made at all the seaports? They had. And with no results? With no results at all. No one had come forward to identify the body? Plenty of people had come forward; but nobody had succeeded in identifying it. Had any effort been made to follow up the clue afforded by the eyeglasses? Inspector Sugg submitted that, having regard to the interests of justice, he would beg to be excused from answering that question. Might the jury see the eyeglasses? The eyeglasses were handed to the jury.

William Watts, called, confirmed the evidence of Sir Julian Freke with regard to dissecting-room subjects. He explained the system by which they were entered. They usually were supplied by the work-houses and free hospitals. They were under his sole charge. The young gentlemen could not possibly get the keys. Had Sir Julian Freke, or any of the house surgeons, the keys? No, not even Sir Julian Freke. The keys had remained in his possession on Monday night? They had. And, in any case, the inquiry was irrelevant, as there was no body missing, nor ever had been? That was the case.

The Coroner then addressed the jury, reminding them with some asperity that they were not there to gossip about who the deceased could or could not have been, but to give their opinion as to the cause

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of death. He reminded them that they should consider whether, according to the medical evidence, death could have been accidental or self-inflicted, or whether it was deliberate murder, or homicide. If they considered the evidence on this point insufficient, they could return an open verdict. In any case, their verdict could not prejudice any person; if they brought it in "murder," all the whole evidence would have to be gone through again before the magistrate. He then dismissed them, with the unspoken adjuration to be quick about it.

Sir Julian Freke, after giving his evidence, had caught the eye of the Duchess, and now came over and greeted her.

"I haven't seen you for an age," said that lady. "How are you?"

"Hard at work," said the specialist. "Just got my new book out. This kind of thing wastes time. Have you seen Lady Levy yet?"

"No, poor dear," said the Duchess. "I only came up this morning, for this. Mrs. Thipps is staying with me—one of Peter's eccentricities, you know. Poor Christine! I must run round and see her. This is Mr. Parker," she added, "who is investigating that case."

"Oh," said Sir Julian, and paused. "Do you know," he said in a low voice to Parker, "I am very glad to meet you. Have you seen Lady Levy yet?"

"I saw her this morning."

"Did she ask you to go on with the inquiry?"

"Yes," said Parker; "she thinks," he added, "that Sir Reuben may be detained in the hands of some

financial rival or that perhaps some scoundrels are holding him to ransom."

"And is that *your* opinion?" asked Sir Julian.

"I think it very likely," said Parker, frankly.

Sir Julian hesitated again.

"I wish you would walk back with me when this is over," he said.

"I should be delighted," said Parker.

At this moment the jury returned and took their places, and there was a little rustle and hush. The Coroner addressed the foreman and inquired if they were agreed upon their verdict.

"We are agreed, Mr. Coroner, that deceased died of the effects of a blow upon the spine, but how that injury was inflicted we consider that there is not sufficient evidence to show."

Mr. Parker and Sir Julian Freke walked up the road together.

"I had absolutely no idea until I saw Lady Levy this morning," said the doctor, "that there was any idea of connecting this matter with the disappearance of Sir Reuben. The suggestion was perfectly monstrous, and could only have grown up in the mind of that ridiculous police officer. If I had had any idea what was in his mind I could have disabused him and avoided all this."

"I did my best to do so," said Parker, "as soon as I was called in to the Levy case—"

"Who called you in, if I may ask?" inquired Sir Julian.

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"Well, the household first of all, and then Sir Reuben's uncle, Mr. Levy of Portman Square, wrote to me to go on with the investigation."

"And now Lady Levy has confirmed those instructions?"

"Certainly," said Parker in some surprise.

Sir Julian was silent for a little time.

"I'm afraid I was the first person to put the idea into Sugg's head," said Parker, rather penitently. "When Sir Reuben disappeared, my first step, almost, was to hunt up all the street accidents and suicides and so on that had turned up during the day, and I went down to see this Battersea Park body as a matter of routine. Of course, I saw that the thing was ridiculous as soon as I got there, but Sugg froze on to the idea—and it's true there was a good deal of resemblance between the dead man and the portraits I've seen of Sir Reuben."

"A strong superficial likeness," said Sir Julian. "The upper part of the face is a not uncommon type, and as Sir Reuben wore a heavy beard and there was no opportunity of comparing the mouths and chins, I can understand the idea occurring to anybody. But only to be dismissed at once. I am sorry," he added, "as the whole matter has been painful to Lady Levy. You may know, Mr. Parker, that I am an old, though I should not call myself an intimate, friend of the Levys."

"I understood something of the sort."

"Yes. When I was a young man I—in short, Mr. Parker, I hoped once to marry Lady Levy." (Mr.

Parker gave the usual sympathetic groan.) "I have never married, as you know," pursued Sir Julian. "We have remained good friends. I have always done what I could to spare her pain."

"Believe me, Sir Julian," said Parker, "that I sympathize very much with you and with Lady Levy, and that I did all I could to disabuse Inspector Sugg of this notion. Unhappily, the coincidence of Sir Reuben's being seen that evening in the Battersea Park Road—"

"Ah, yes," said Sir Julian. "Dear me, here we are at home. Perhaps you would come in for a moment, Mr. Parker, and have tea or a whisky-and-soda or something."

Parker promptly accepted this invitation, feeling that there were other things to be said.

The two men stepped into a square, finely furnished hall with a fireplace on the same side as the door, and a staircase opposite. The dining-room door stood open on their right, and as Sir Julian rang the bell a man-servant appeared at the far end of the hall.

"What will you take?" asked the doctor.

"After that dreadfully cold place," said Parker, "what I really want is gallons of hot tea, if you, as a nerve specialist, can bear the thought of it."

"Provided you allow of a judicious blend of China in it," replied Sir Julian in the same tone, "I have no objection to make. Tea in the library at once," he added to the servant, and led the way upstairs.

"I don't use the downstairs rooms much, except

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the dining-room," he explained as he ushered his guest into a small but cheerful library on the first floor. "This room leads out of my bedroom and is more convenient. I only live part of my time here, but it's very handy for my research work at the hospital. That's what I do there, mostly. It's a fatal thing for a theorist, Mr. Parker, to let the practical work get behindhand. Dissection is the basis of all good theory and all correct diagnosis. One must keep one's hand and eye in training. This place is far more important to me than Harley Street, and some day I shall abandon my consulting practice altogether and settle down here to cut up my subjects and write my books in peace. So many things in this life are a waste of time, Mr. Parker."

Mr. Parker assented to this.

"Very often," said Sir Julian, "the only time I get for any research work—necessitating as it does the keenest observation and the faculties at their acutest—has to be at night, after a long day's work and by artificial light, which, magnificent as the lighting of the dissecting room here is, is always more trying to the eyes than daylight. Doubtless your own work has to be carried on under even more trying conditions."

"Yes, sometimes," said Parker; "but then you see," he added, "the conditions are, so to speak, part of the work."

"Quite so, quite so," said Sir Julian; "you mean that the burglar, for example, does not demonstrate his methods in the light of day, or plant the perfect

footmark in the middle of a damp patch of sand for you to analyze."

"Not as a rule," said the detective, "but I have no doubt many of your diseases work quite as insidiously as any burglar."

"They do, they do," said Sir Julian, laughing, "and it is my pride, as it is yours, to track them down for the good of society. The neuroses, you know, are particularly clever criminals—they break out into as many disguises as—"

"As Leon Kestrel, the Master-Mummer," suggested Parker, who read railway-stall detective stories on the principle of the 'busman's holiday.

"No doubt," said Sir Julian, who did not, "and they cover up their tracks wonderfully. But when you can really investigate, Mr. Parker, and break up the dead, or for preference the living body with the scalpel, you always find the footmarks—the little trail of ruin or disorder left by madness or disease or drink or any other similar pest. But the difficulty is to trace them back, merely by observing the surface symptoms—the hysteria, crime, religion, fear, shyness, conscience, or whatever it may be; just as you observe a theft or a murder and look for the footsteps of the criminal, so I observe a fit of hysterics or an outburst of piety and hunt for the little mechanical irritation which has produced it."

"You regard all these things as physical?"

"Undoubtedly. I am not ignorant of the rise of another school of thought, Mr. Parker, but its exponents are mostly charlatans or self-deceivers. *Sie*

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haben sich so weit darin eingeheimnisst’ that, like Sludge the Medium, they are beginning to believe their own nonsense. I should like to have the exploring of some of their brains, Mr. Parker; I would show you the little faults and landslips in the cells—the misfiring and short-circuiting of the nerves, which produce these notions and these books. At least,” he added, gazing sombrely at his guest, “at least, if I could not quite show you today, I shall be able to do so tomorrow—or in a year’s time—or before I die.”

He sat for some minutes gazing into the fire, while the red light played upon his tawny beard and struck out answering gleams from his compelling eyes.

Parker drank tea in silence, watching him. On the whole, however, he remained but little interested in the causes of nervous phenomena and his mind strayed to Lord Peter, coping with the redoubtable Crimplesham down in Salisbury. Lord Peter had wanted him to come: that meant, either that Crimplesham was proving recalcitrant or that a clue wanted following. But Bunter had said that tomorrow would do, and it was just as well. After all, the Battersea affair was not Parker’s case; he had already wasted valuable time attending an inconclusive inquest, and he really ought to get on with his legitimate work. There was still Levy’s secretary to see and the little matter of the Peruvian Oil to be looked into. He looked at his watch.

“I am very much afraid—if you will excuse me—” he murmured.

Sir Julian came back with a start to the consideration of actuality.

"Your work calls you?" he said, smiling. "Well, I can understand that. I won't keep you. But I wanted to say something to you in connection with your present inquiry—only I hardly know—I hardly like—"

Parker sat down again, and banished every indication of hurry from his face and attitude.

"I shall be very grateful for any help you can give me," he said.

"I'm afraid it's more in the nature of hindrance," said Sir Julian, with a short laugh. "It's a case of destroying a clue for you, and a breach of professional confidence on my side. But since—accidentally—a certain amount has come out, perhaps the whole had better do so."

Mr. Parker made the encouraging noise which, among laymen, supplies the place of the priest's insinuating, "Yes, my son?"

"Sir Reuben Levy's visit on Monday night was to me," said Sir Julian.

"Yes?" said Mr. Parker, without expression.

"He found cause for certain grave suspicions concerning his health," said Sir Julian, slowly, as though weighing how much he could in honour disclose to a stranger. "He came to me, in preference to his own medical man, as he was particularly anxious that the matter should be kept from his wife. As I told you, he knew me fairly well, and Lady Levy had consulted me about a nervous disorder in the summer."

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"Did he make an appointment with you?" asked Parker.

"I beg your pardon," said the other, absently.

"Did he make an appointment?"

"An appointment? Oh, no! He turned up suddenly in the evening after dinner when I wasn't expecting him. I took him up here and examined him, and he left me somewhere about ten o'clock, I should think."

"May I ask what was the result of your examination?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"It might illuminate—well, conjecture as to his subsequent conduct," said Parker, cautiously. This story seemed to have little coherence with the rest of the business, and he wondered whether coincidence was alone responsible for Sir Reuben's disappearance on the same night that he visited the doctor.

"I see," said Sir Julian. "Yes. Well, I will tell you in confidence that I saw grave grounds of suspicion, but as yet, no absolute certainty of mischief."

"Thank you. Sir Reuben left you at ten o'clock?"

"Then or thereabouts. I did not at first mention the matter as it was so very much Sir Reuben's wish to keep his visit to me secret, and there was no question of accident in the street or anything of that kind, since he reached home safely at midnight."

"Quite so," said Parker.

"It would have been, and is, a breach of confidence," said Sir Julian, "and I only tell you now because Sir Reuben was accidentally seen, and because I would rather tell you in private than have you fer-

retting round here and questioning my servants, Mr. Parker. You will excuse my frankness."

"Certainly," said Parker. "I hold no brief for the pleasantness of my profession, Sir Julian. I am very much obliged to you for telling me this. I might otherwise have wasted valuable time following up a false trail."

"I am sure I need not ask you, in your turn, to respect this confidence," said the doctor. "To publish the matter abroad could only harm Sir Reuben and pain his wife, besides placing me in no favourable light with my patients."

"I promise to keep the thing to myself," said Parker, "except of course," he added hastily, "that I must inform my colleague."

"You have a colleague in the case?"

"I have."

"What sort of person is he?"

"He will be perfectly discreet, Sir Julian."

"Is he a police officer?"

"You need not be afraid of your confidence getting into the records at Scotland Yard."

"I see that you know how to be discreet, Mr. Parker."

"We also have our professional etiquette, Sir Julian."

On returning to Great Ormond Street, Mr. Parker found a wire awaiting him, which said: "Do not trouble to come. All well. Returning tomorrow. Wimsey."

CHAPTER VII

ON RETURNING TO THE FLAT JUST BEFORE LUNCH-time on the following morning, after a few confirmatory researches in Balham and the neighbourhood of Victoria Station, Lord Peter was greeted at the door by Mr. Bunter (who had gone straight home from Waterloo) with a telephone message and a severe and nursemaid-like eye.

"Lady Swaffham rang up, my lord, and said she hoped your lordship had not forgotten you were lunching with her."

"I have forgotten, Bunter, and I mean to forget. I trust you told her I had succumbed to lethargic encephalitis suddenly, no flowers by request."

"Lady Swaffham said, my lord, she was counting on you. She met the Duchess of Denver yesterday—"

"If my sister-in-law's there I won't go, that's flat," said Lord Peter.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, the Dowager Duchess."

"What's she doing in town?"

"I imagine she came up for the inquest, my lord."

"Oh, yes—we missed that, Bunter."

"Yes, my lord. Her Grace is lunching with Lady Swaffham."

"Bunter, I can't. I can't, really. Say I'm in bed with

whooping cough, and ask my mother to come round after lunch."

"Very well, my lord. Mrs. Tommy Frayle will be at Lady Swaffham's, my lord, and Mr. Milligan—"

"Mr. who?"

"Mr. John P. Milligan, my lord, and—"

"Good God, Bunter, why didn't you say so before? Have I time to get there before he does? All right. I'm off. With a taxi I can just—"

"Not in those trousers, my lord," said Mr. Bunter, blocking the way to the door with deferential firmness.

"Oh, Bunter," pleaded his lordship, "do let me—just this once. You don't know how important it is."

"Not on any account, my lord. It would be as much as my place is worth."

"The trousers are all right, Bunter."

"Not for Lady Swaffham's, my lord. Besides, your lordship forgets the man that ran against you with a milk-can at Salisbury."

And Mr. Bunter laid an accusing finger on a slight stain of grease showing across the light cloth.

"I wish to God I'd never let you grow into a privileged family retainer, Bunter," said Lord Peter, bitterly, dashing his walking-stick into the umbrella-stand. "You've no conception of the mistakes my mother may be making."

Mr. Bunter smiled grimly and led his victim away.

When an immaculate Lord Peter was ushered, rather late for lunch, into Lady Swaffham's drawing-room, the Dowager Duchess of Denver was seated on

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a sofa, plunged in intimate conversation with Mr. John P. Milligan of Chicago.

"I'm vurry pleased to meet you, Duchess," had been that financier's opening remark, "to thank you for your exceedingly kind invitation. I assure you it's a compliment I deeply appreciate."

The Duchess beamed at him, while conducting a rapid rally of all her intellectual forces.

"Do come and sit down and talk to me, Mr. Milligan," she said. "I do so love talking to you great business men—let me see, is it a railway king you are or something about puss-in-the-corner—at least, I don't mean that exactly, but that game one used to play with cards, all about wheat and oats, and there was a bull and a bear, too—or was it a horse?—no, a bear, because I remember one always had to try and get rid of it and it used to get so dreadfully crumpled and torn, poor thing, always being handed about, one got to recognise it, and then one had to buy a new pack—so foolish it must seem to you, knowing the real thing, and dreadfully noisy, but really excellent for breaking the ice with rather stiff people who didn't know each other—I'm quite sorry it's gone out."

Mr. Milligan sat down.

"Wal, now," he said, "I guess it's as interesting for us business men to meet British aristocrats as it is for Britishers to meet American railway kings, Duchess. And I guess I'll make as many mistakes talking your kind of talk as you would make if you were tryin' to

run a corner in wheat in Chicago. Fancy now, I called that fine lad of yours Lord Wimsey the other day, and he though I'd mistaken him for his brother. That made me feel rather green."

This was an unhopd-for lead. The Duchess walked warily.

"Dear boy," she said, "I am so glad you met him, Mr. Milligan. *Both* my sons are a *great* comfort to me, you know, though, of course, Gerald is more conventional—just the right kind of person for the House of Lords, you know, and a splendid farmer. I can't see Peter down at Denver half so well, though he is always going to all the right things in town, and very amusing sometimes, poor boy."

"I was vurry much gratified by Lord Peter's suggestion," pursued Mr. Milligan, "for which I understand you are responsible, and I'll surely be very pleased to come any day you like, though I think you're flattering me too much."

"Ah, well," said the Duchess, "I don't know if you're the best judge of that, Mr. Milligan. Not that I know anything about business myself," she added. "I'm rather old-fashioned for these days, you know, and I can't pretend to do more than know a nice *man* when I see him; for the other things I rely on my son."

The accent of this speech was so flattering that Mr. Milligan purred almost audibly, and said:

"Wal, Duchess, I guess that's where a lady with a real, beautiful, old-fashioned soul has the advantage of these modern young blatherskites—there aren't

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many men who wouldn't be nice—to her, and even then, if they aren't rock-bottom she can see through them.”

“But that leaves me where I was,” thought the Duchess. “I believe,” she said aloud, “that I ought to be thanking you in the name of the vicar of Duke's Denver for a very munificent cheque which reached him yesterday for the Church Restoration Fund. He was so delighted and astonished, poor dear man.”

“Oh, that's nothing,” said Mr. Milligan, “we haven't any fine old crusted buildings like yours over on our side, so it's a privilege to be allowed to drop a little kerosene into the worm-holes when we hear of one in the old country suffering from senile decay. So when your lad told me about Duke's Denver I took the liberty to subscribe without waiting for the Bazaar.”

“I'm sure it was very kind of you,” said the Duchess. “You are coming to the Bazaar, then?” she continued, gazing into his face appealingly.

“Sure thing,” said Mr. Milligan, with great promptness. “Lord Peter said you'd let me know for sure about the date, but we can always make time for a little bit of good work anyway. Of course I'm hoping to be able to avail myself of your kind invitation to stop, but if I'm rushed, I'll manage anyhow to pop over and speak my piece and pop back again.”

“I hope so very much,” said the Duchess. “I must see what can be done about the date—of course, I can't promise—”

“No, no,” said Mr. Milligan heartily. “I know what

these things are to fix up. And then there's not only me—there's all the real big men of European eminence your son mentioned, to be consulted."

The Duchess turned pale at the thought that any one of these illustrious persons might some time turn up in somebody's drawing-room, but by this time she had dug herself in comfortably, and was even beginning to find her range.

"I can't say how grateful we are to you," she said; "it will be such a treat. Do tell me what you think of saying."

"Wal—" began Mr. Milligan.

Suddenly everybody was standing up and a penitent voice was heard to say:

"Really, most awfully sorry, y'know—hope you'll forgive me, Lady Swaffham, what? Dear lady, could I possibly forget an invitation from you? Fact is, I had to go an' see a man down in Salisbury—absolutely true, 'pon my word, and the fellow wouldn't let me get away. I'm simply grovelling before you, Lady Swaffham. Shall I go an' eat my lunch in the corner?"

Lady Swaffham gracefully forgave the culprit.

"Your dear mother is here," she said.

"How do, Mother?" said Lord Peter, uneasily.

"How are you, dear?" replied the Duchess. "You really oughtn't to have turned up just yet. Mr. Milligan was just going to tell me what a thrilling speech he's preparing for the Bazaar, when you came and interrupted us."

Conversation at lunch turned, not unnaturally, on the Battersea inquest, the Duchess giving a vivid im-

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personation of Mrs. Thipps being interrogated by the Coroner.

"'Did you hear anything unusual in the night?' says the little man, leaning forward and screaming at her, and so crimson in the face and his ears sticking out so—just like a cherubim in that poem of Tennyson's—or is a cherub blue?—perhaps it's a seraphim I mean—anyway, you know what I mean, all eyes, with little wings on its head. And dear old Mrs. Thipps saying, 'Of course I have, any time these eighty years,' and *such* a sensation in court till they found out she thought he'd said, 'Do you sleep without a light?' and everybody laughing, and then the Coroner said quite loudly, 'Damn the woman,' and she heard that, I can't think why, and said: 'Don't you get swearing, young man, sitting there in the presence of Providence, as you may say. I don't know what young people are coming to nowadays'—and he's sixty if he's a day, you know," said the Duchess.

By a natural transition, Mrs. Tommy Frayle referred to the man who was hanged for murdering three brides in a bath.

"I always thought that was so ingenious," she said, gazing soulfully at Lord Peter, "and do you know, as it happened, Tommy had just made me insure my life, and I got so frightened, I gave up my morning bath and took to having it in the afternoon when he was in the House—I mean, when he was *not* in the house—not at home, I mean."

"Dear lady," said Lord Peter, reproachfully, "I

have a distinct recollection that all those brides were thoroughly unattractive. But it was an uncommonly ingenious plan—the first time of askin’—only he shouldn’t have repeated himself.”

“One demands a little originality in these days, even from murderers,” said Lady Swaffham. “Like dramatists, you know—so much easier in Shakespeare’s time, wasn’t it? Always the same girl dressed up as a man, and even that borrowed from Boccaccio or Dante or somebody. I’m sure if I’d been a Shakespeare hero, the very minute I saw a slim-legged young page-boy I’d have said: ‘Odsbodikins! There’s that girl again!’ ”

“That’s just what happened, as a matter of fact,” said Lord Peter. “You see, Lady Swaffham, if ever you want to commit a murder, the thing you’ve got to do is to prevent people from associatin’ their ideas. Most people don’t associate anythin’—their ideas just roll about like so many dry peas on a tray, makin’ a lot of noise and goin’ nowhere, but once you begin lettin’ ’em string their peas into a necklace, it’s goin’ to be strong enough to hang you, what?”

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Tommy Frayle, with a little scream, “what a blessing it is none of my friends have any ideas at all!”

“Y’see,” said Lord Peter, balancing a piece of duck on his fork and frowning, “it’s only in Sherlock Holmes and stories like that, that people think things out logically. Or’nar’ly, if somebody tells you somethin’ out of the way, you just say, ‘By Jove!’ or ‘How sad!’ an’ leave it at that, an’ half the time you forget

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about it, 'nless somethin' turns up afterwards to drive it home. F'r instance, Lady Swaffham, I told you when I came in that I'd been down to Salisbury, 'n' that's true, only I don't suppose it impressed you much; 'n' I don't suppose it'd impress you much if you read in the paper tomorrow of a tragic discovery of a dead lawyer down in Salisbury, but if I went to Salisbury again next week 'n' there was a Salisbury doctor found dead the day after, you might begin to think I was a bird of ill omen for Salisbury residents; and if I went there again the week after, 'n' you heard next day that the see of Salisbury had fallen vacant suddenly, you might begin to wonder what took me to Salisbury, an' why I'd never mentioned before that I had friends down there, don't you see, an' you might think of goin' down to Salisbury yourself, an' askin' all kinds of people if they'd happened to see a young man in plum-coloured socks hangin' round the Bishop's Palace."

"I daresay I should," said Lady Swaffham.

"Quite. An' if you found that the lawyer and the doctor had once upon a time been in business at Poggleton-on-the-Marsh when the Bishop had been vicar there, you'd begin to remember you'd once heard of me payin' a visit to Poggleton-on-the-Marsh a long time ago, an' you'd begin to look up the parish registers there an' discover I'd been married under an assumed name by the vicar to the widow of a wealthy farmer, who'd died suddenly of peritonitis, as certified by the doctor, after the lawyer'd made a will leavin' me all her money, and *then* you'd begin

to think I might have very good reasons for gettin' rid of such promisin' blackmailers as the lawyer, the doctor an' the bishop. Only, if I hadn't started an association in your mind by gettin' rid of 'em all in the same place, you'd never have thought of goin' to Poggleton-on-the-Marsh, 'n' you wouldn't even have remembered I'd ever been there."

"*Were* you ever there, Lord Peter?" inquired Mrs. Tommy, anxiously.

"I don't think so," said Lord Peter; "the name threads no beads in my mind. But it might, any day, you know."

"But if you were investigating a crime," said Lady Swaffham, "you'd have to begin by the usual things, I suppose—finding out what the person had been doing, and who'd been to call, and looking for a motive, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Lord Peter, "but most of us have such dozens of motives for murderin' all sorts of in-offensive people. There's lots of people I'd like to murder, wouldn't you?"

"Heaps," said Lady Swaffham. "There's that dreadful—perhaps I'd better not say it, though, for fear you should remember it later on."

"Well, I wouldn't if I were you," said Peter, amiably. "You never know. It'd be beastly awkward if the person died suddenly tomorrow."

"The difficulty with this Battersea case, I guess," said Mr. Milligan, "is that nobody seems to have any associations with the gentleman in the bath."

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"So hard on poor Inspector Sugg," said the Duchess. "I quite felt for the man, having to stand up there and answer a lot of questions when he had nothing at all to say."

Lord Peter applied himself to the duck, having got a little behindhand. Presently he heard somebody ask the Duchess if she had seen Lady Levy.

"She is in great distress," said the woman who had spoken, a Mrs. Freemantle, "though she clings to the hope that he will turn up. I suppose you knew him, Mr. Milligan—know him, I should say, for I hope he's still alive somewhere."

Mrs. Freemantle was the wife of an eminent railway director, and celebrated for her ignorance of the world of finance. Her *faux pas* in this connection enlivened the tea parties of City men's wives.

"Wal, I've dined with him," said Mr. Milligan, good-naturedly. "I think he and I've done our best to ruin each other, Mrs. Freemantle. If this were the States," he added, "I'd be much inclined to suspect myself of having put Sir Reuben in a safe place. But we can't do business that way in your old country; no, ma'am."

"It must be exciting work doing business in America," said Lord Peter.

"It is," said Mr. Milligan. "I guess my brothers are having a good time there now. I'll be joining them again before long, as soon as I've fixed up a little bit of work for them on this side."

"Well, you mustn't go till after my bazaar," said the Duchess.

Lord Peter spent the afternoon in a vain hunt for Mr. Parker. He ran him down eventually after dinner in Great Ormond Street.

Parker was sitting in an elderly but affectionate armchair, with his feet on the mantelpiece, relaxing his mind with a modern commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians. He received Lord Peter with quiet pleasure, though without rapturous enthusiasm, and mixed him a whisky-and-soda. Peter took up the book his friend had laid down and glanced over the pages.

"All these men work with a bias in their minds, one way or other," he said; "they find what they are looking for."

"Oh, they do," agreed the detective; "but one learns to discount that almost automatically, you know. When I was at college, I was all on the other side—Conybeare and Robertson and Drews and those people, you know, till I found they were all so busy looking for a burglar whom nobody had ever seen, that they couldn't recognise the footprints of the household, so to speak. Then I spent two years learning to be cautious."

"Hum," said Lord Peter, "theology must be good exercise for the brain then, for you're easily the most cautious devil I know. But I say, do go on reading—it's a shame for me to come and root you up in your off-time like this."

"It's all right, old man," said Parker.

The two men sat silent for a little, and then Lord Peter said:

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"D'you like your job?"

The detective considered the question, and replied:

"Yes—yes, I do. I know it to be useful, and I am fitted to it. I do it quite well—not with inspiration, perhaps, but sufficiently well to take a pride in it. It is full of variety and it forces one to keep up to the mark and not get slack. And there's a future to it. Yes, I like it. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," said Peter. "It's a hobby to me, you see. I took it up when the bottom of things was rather knocked out for me, because it was so damned exciting, and the worst of it is, I enjoy it—up to a point. If it was all on paper I'd enjoy every bit of it. I love the beginning of a job—when one doesn't know any of the people and it's just exciting and amusing. But if it comes to really running down a live person and getting him hanged, or even quodded, poor devil, there don't seem as if there was any excuse for me buttin' in, since I don't have to make my livin' by it. And I feel as if I oughtn't ever to find it amusin'. But I do."

Parker gave this speech his careful attention.

"I see what you mean," he said.

"There's old Milligan, f'r instance," said Lord Peter. "On paper, nothin' would be funnier than to catch old Milligan out. But he's rather a decent old bird to talk to. Mother likes him. He's taken a fancy to me. It's awfully entertainin' goin' and pumpin' him with stuff about a bazaar for church expenses, but when he's so jolly pleased about it and that, I feel a worm. S'pose old Milligan has cut Levy's throat

and plugged him into the Thames. It ain't my business."

"It's as much yours as anybody's," said Parker; "it's no better to do it for money than to do it for nothing."

"Yes, it is," said Peter stubbornly. "Havin' to live is the only excuse there is for doin' that kind of thing."

"Well, but look here!" said Parker. "If Milligan has cut poor old Levy's throat for no reason except to make himself richer, I don't see why he should buy himself off by giving £1,000 to Duke's Denver church roof, or why he should be forgiven just because he's childishly vain, or childishly snobbish."

"That's a nasty one," said Lord Peter.

"Well, if you like, even because he has taken a fancy to you."

"No, but—"

"Look here, Wimsey—do you think he *has* murdered Levy?"

"Well, he may have."

"But do you think he has?"

"I don't want to think so."

"Because he has taken a fancy to you?"

"Well, that biases me, of course—"

"I daresay it's quite a legitimate bias. You don't think a callous murderer would be likely to take a fancy to you?"

"Well—besides, I've taken rather a fancy to him."

"I daresay that's quite legitimate, too. You've observed him and made a subconscious deduction from

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your observations, and the result is, you don't think he did it. Well, why not? You're entitled to take that into account."

"But perhaps I'm wrong and he did do it."

"Then why let your vainglorious conceit in your own power of estimating character stand in the way of unmasking the singularly cold-blooded murder of an innocent and lovable man?"

"I know—but I don't feel I'm playing the game somehow."

"Look here, Peter," said the other with some earnestness, "suppose you get this playing-fields-of-Eton complex out of your system once and for all. There doesn't seem to be much doubt that something unpleasant has happened to Sir Reuben Levy. Call it murder, to strengthen the argument. If Sir Reuben has been murdered, is it a game? and is it fair to treat it as a game?"

"That's what I'm ashamed of, really," said Lord Peter. "It *is* a game to me, to begin with, and I go on cheerfully, and then I suddenly see that somebody is going to be hurt, and I want to get out of it."

"Yes, yes, I know," said the detective, "but that's because you're thinking about your attitude. You want to be consistent, you want to look pretty, you want to swagger debonairly through a comedy of puppets or else to stalk magnificently through a tragedy of human sorrows and things. But that's childish. If you've any duty to society in the way of finding out the truth about murders, you must do it in any attitude that comes handy. You want to be

elegant and detached? That's all right, if you find the truth out that way, but it hasn't any value in itself, you know. You want to look dignified and consistent—what's that got to do with it? You want to hunt down a murderer for the sport of the thing and then shake hands with him and say, 'Well played—hard luck—you shall have your revenge tomorrow!' Well, you can't do it like that. Life's not a football match. You want to be a sportsman. You can't be a sportsman. You're a responsible person."

"I don't think you ought to read so much theology," said Lord Peter. "It has a brutalizing influence."

He got up and paced about the room, looking idly over the bookshelves. Then he sat down again, filled and lit his pipe, and said:

"Well, I'd better tell you about the ferocious and hardened Crimplesham."

He detailed his visit to Salisbury. Once assured of his bona fides, Mr. Crimplesham had given him the fullest details of his visit to town.

"And I've substantiated it all," groaned Lord Peter, "and unless he's corrupted half Balham, there's no doubt he spent the night there. And the afternoon was really spent with the bank people. And half the residents of Salisbury seem to have seen him off on Monday before lunch. And nobody but his own family or young Wicks seems to have anything to gain by his death. And even if young Wicks wanted to make away with him, it's rather far-fetched to go and murder an unknown man in Thipps's place in

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order to stick Crimplesham's eyeglasses on his nose."

"Where was young Wicks on Monday?" asked Parker.

"At a dance given by the Precentor," said Lord Peter, wildly. "David—his name is David—dancing before the ark of the Lord in the face of the whole Cathedral Close."

There was a pause.

"Tell me about the inquest," said Wimsey.

Parker obliged with a summary of the evidence.

"Do you believe the body could have been concealed in the flat after all?" he asked. "I know we looked, but I suppose we might have missed something."

"We might. But Sugg looked as well."

"Sugg!"

"You do Sugg an injustice," said Lord Peter; "if there had been any signs of Thipps's complicity in the crime, Sugg would have found them."

"Why?"

"Why? Because he was looking for them. He's like your commentators on Galatians. He thinks that either Thipps, or Gladys Horrocks, or Gladys Horrocks's young man did it. Therefore he found marks on the window sill where Gladys Horrocks's young man might have come in or handed something in to Gladys Horrocks. He didn't find any signs on the roof, because he wasn't looking for them."

"But he went over the roof before me."

"Yes, but only in order to prove that there were no marks there. He reasons like this: Gladys Hor-

rocks's young man is a glazier. Glaziers come on ladders. Glaziers have ready access to ladders. Therefore Gladys Horrocks's young man had ready access to a ladder. Therefore Gladys Horrocks's young man came on a ladder. Therefore there will be marks on the window sill and none on the roof. Therefore he finds marks on the window sill but none on the roof. He finds no marks on the ground, but he thinks he would have found them if the yard didn't happen to be paved with asphalt. Similarly, he thinks Mr. Thipps may have concealed the body in the box-room or elsewhere. Therefore you may be sure he searched the box-room and all the other places for signs of occupation. If they had been there he would have found them, because he was looking for them. Therefore, if he didn't find them it's because they weren't there."

"All right," said Parker, "stop talking. I believe you."

He went on to detail the medical evidence.

"By the way," said Lord Peter, "to skip across for a moment to the other case, has it occurred to you that perhaps Levy was going out to see Freke on Monday night?"

"He was; he did," said Parker, rather unexpectedly, and proceeded to recount his interview with the nerve-specialist.

"Humph!" said Lord Peter. "I say, Parker, these are funny cases, ain't they? Every line of inquiry seems to peter out. It's awfully exciting up to a point,

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you know, and then nothing comes of it. It's like rivers getting lost in the sand."

"Yes," said Parker. "And there's another one I lost this morning."

"What's that?"

"Oh, I was pumping Levy's secretary about his business. I couldn't get much that seemed important except further details about the Argentine and so on. Then I thought I'd just ask round in the City about those Peruvian Oil shares, but Levy hadn't even heard of them so far as I could make out. I routed out the brokers, and found a lot of mystery and concealment, as one always does, you know, when somebody's been rigging the market, and at last I found one name at the back of it. But it wasn't Levy's."

"No? Whose was it?"

"Oddly enough, Freke's. It seems mysterious. He bought a lot of shares last week, in a secret kind of way, a few of them in his own name, and then quietly sold 'em out on Tuesday at a small profit—a few hundreds, not worth going to all that trouble about, you wouldn't think."

"Shouldn't have thought he ever went in for that kind of gamble."

"He doesn't as a rule. That's the funny part of it."

"Well, you never know," said Lord Peter; "people do these things just to prove to themselves or somebody else that they could make a fortune that way if they liked. I've done it myself in a small way."

He knocked out his pipe and rose to go.

"I say, old man," he said suddenly, as Parker was

letting him out, "does it occur to you that Freke's story doesn't fit in awfully well with what Anderson said about the old boy having been so jolly at dinner on Monday night? Would you be, if you thought you'd got anything of that sort?"

"No, I shouldn't," said Parker; "but," he added with his habitual caution, "some men will jest in the dentist's waiting-room. You, for one."

"Well, that's true," said Lord Peter, and went downstairs.

CHAPTER VIII

LORD PETER REACHED HOME ABOUT MIDNIGHT, feeling extraordinarily wakeful and alert. Something was jiggling and worrying in his brain; it felt like a hive of bees, stirred up by a stick. He felt as though he were looking at a complicated riddle, of which he had once been told the answer but had forgotten it and was always on the point of remembering.

"Somewhere," said Lord Peter to himself, "somewhere I've got the key to these two things. I know I've got it, only I can't remember what it is. Somebody said it. Perhaps I said it. I can't remember where, but I know I've got it. Go to bed, Bunter, I shall sit up a little. I'll just slip on a dressing-gown."

Before the fire he sat down with his pipe in his mouth and his jazz-coloured peacocks gathered about him. He traced out this line and that line of investigation—rivers running into the sand. They ran out from the thought of Levy, last seen at ten o'clock in Prince of Wales Road. They ran back from the picture of the grotesque dead man in Mr. Thipps's bath-room—they ran over the roof, and were lost—lost in the sand. Rivers running into the sand—rivers running underground, very far down—

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

By leaning his head down, it seemed to Lord Peter that he could hear them, very faintly, liping and gurgling somewhere in the darkness. But where? He felt quite sure that somebody had told him once, only he had forgotten.

He roused himself, threw a log on the fire, and picked up a book which the indefatigable Bunter, carrying on his daily fatigues amid the excitements of special duty, had brought from the Times Book Club. It happened to be Sir Julian Freke's "Physiological Bases of the Conscience," which he had seen reviewed two days before.

"This ought to send one to sleep," said Lord Peter; "if I can't leave these problems to my subconscious I'll be as limp as a rag tomorrow."

He opened the book slowly, and glanced carelessly through the preface.

"I wonder if that's true about Levy being ill," he thought, putting the book down; "it doesn't seem likely. And yet— Dash it all, I'll take my mind off it."

He read on resolutely for a little.

"I don't suppose Mother's kept up with the Levys much," was the next importunate train of thought. "Dad always hated self-made people and wouldn't have 'em at Denver. And old Gerald keeps up the tradition. I wonder if she knew Freke well in those days. She seems to get on with Milligan. I trust Mother's judgment a good deal. She was a brick about that bazaar business. I ought to have warned her. She said something once—"

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He pursued an elusive memory for some minutes, till it vanished altogether with a mocking flicker of the tail. He returned to his reading.

Presently another thought crossed his mind aroused by a photograph of some experiment in surgery.

"If the evidence of Freke and that man Watts hadn't been so positive," he said to himself, "I should be inclined to look into the matter of those shreds of lint on the chimney."

He considered this, shook his head and read with determination.

Mind and matter were one thing, that was the theme of the physiologist. Matter could erupt, as it were, into ideas. You could carve passions in the brain with a knife. You could get rid of imagination with drugs and cure an outworn convention like a disease. "The knowledge of good and evil is an observed phenomenon, attendant upon a certain condition of the brain-cells, which is removable." That was one phrase; and again:

"Conscience in man may, in fact, be compared to the sting of a hive-bee, which, so far from conducing to the welfare of its possessor, cannot function, even in a single instance, without occasioning its death. The survival-value in each case is thus purely social; and if humanity ever passes from its present phase of social development into that of a higher individualism, as some of our philosophers have ventured to speculate, we may suppose that this interesting mental phenomenon may gradually cease to appear; just as the nerves and muscles which once controlled the

movements of our ears and scalps have, in all save a few backward individuals, become atrophied and of interest only to the physiologist."

"By Jove!" thought Lord Peter, idly, "that's an ideal doctrine for the criminal. A man who believed that would never—"

And then it happened—the thing he had been half-unconsciously expecting. It happened suddenly, surely, as unmistakably, as sunrise. He remembered—not one thing, nor another thing, nor a logical succession of things, but everything—the whole thing, perfect, complete, in all its dimensions as it were and instantaneously; as if he stood outside the world and saw it suspended in infinitely dimensional space. He no longer needed to reason about it, or even to think about it. He knew it.

There is a game in which one is presented with a jumble of letters and is required to make a word out of them, as thus:

C O S S S S R I

The slow way of solving the problem is to try out all the permutations and combinations in turn, throwing away impossible conjunctions of letters, as:

S S S I R C

or

S C S R S O

Another way is to stare at the inco-ordinate elements until, by no logical process that the conscious mind

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can detect, or under some adventitious external stimulus, the combination:

SCISSORS

presents itself with calm certainty. After that, one does not even need to arrange the letters in order. The thing is done.

Even so, the scattered elements of two grotesque conundrums, flung higgledy-piggledy into Lord Peter's mind, resolved themselves, unquestioned henceforward. A bump on the roof of the end house—Levy in a welter of cold rain talking to a prostitute in the Battersea Park Road—a single ruddy hair—lint bandages—Inspector Sugg calling the great surgeon from the dissecting-room of the hospital—Lady Levy with a nervous attack—the smell of carbolic soap—the Duchess's voice—"not really an engagement, only a sort of understanding with her father"—shares in Peruvian Oil—the dark skin and curved, fleshy profile of the man in the bath—Dr. Grimbolt giving evidence, "In my opinion, death did not occur for several days after the blow"—india-rubber gloves—even, faintly, the voice of Mr. Appledore, "He called on me, sir, with an anti-vivisectionist pamphlet"—all these things and many others rang together and made one sound, they swung together like bells in a steeple, with the deep tenor booming through the clamour:

"The knowledge of good and evil is a phenomenon of the brain, and is removable, removable, removable. The knowledge of good and evil is removable."

Lord Peter Wimsey was not a young man who habitually took himself very seriously, but this time he was frankly appalled. "It's impossible," said his reason, feebly; "*credo quia impossibile*," said his interior certainty with impervious self-satisfaction. "All right," said conscience, instantly allying itself with blind faith, "what are you going to do about it?"

Lord Peter got up and paced the room: "Good Lord!" he said. "Good Lord!" He took down "Who's Who" from the little shelf over the telephone and sought comfort in its pages:

FREKE, Sir Julian, Kt. *cr.* 1916; G.C.V.O. *cr.* 1919; K.C.V.O. 1917; K.C.B. 1918; M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S., Dr. en Méd. Paris; D. Sci. Cantab.; Knight of Grace of the Order of S. John of Jerusalem; Consulting Surgeon of St. Luke's Hospital, Battersea. *b.* Gryllingham, 16 March, 1872, *only son* of Edward Curzon Freke, Esq., of Gryll Court, Gryllingham. *Educ.* Harrow and Trinity Coll., Cambridge; Col. A.M.S.; late Member of the Advisory Board of the Army Medical Service. *Publications:* Some Notes on the Pathological Aspects of Genius, 1892; Statistical Contributions to the Study of Infantile Paralysis in England and Wales, 1894; Functional Disturbances of the Nervous System, 1899; Cerebro-Spinal Diseases, 1904; The Borderland of Insanity, 1906; An Examination into the Treatment of Pauper Lunacy in the United Kingdom, 1906; Modern Developments in Psycho-Therapy: A Criticism, 1910; Criminal Lunacy, 1914; The Application of Psycho-Therapy to the Treatment of Shell-Shock, 1917; An Answer to Professor Freud, with a Description of Some Experiments Carried Out at the Base Hospital at Amiens, 1919; Structural Modifications Accompanying the More Important Neuroses, 1920. *Clubs:* White's; Oxford and

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Cambridge; Alpine, etc. *Recreations*: Chess, Mountaineering, Fishing. *Address*: 282, Harley Street and St. Luke's House, Prince of Wales Road, Battersea Park, S.W.11."

He flung the book away. "Confirmation!" he groaned. "As if I needed it!"

He sat down again and buried his face in his hands. He remembered quite suddenly how, years ago, he had stood before the breakfast table at Denver Castle—a small, peaky boy in blue knickers, with a thunderously beating heart. The family had not come down; there was a great silver urn with a spirit lamp under it, and an elaborate coffee-pot boiling in a glass dome. He had twitched the corner of the tablecloth—twitched it harder, and the urn moved ponderously forward and all the teaspoons rattled. He seized the tablecloth in a firm grip and pulled his hardest—he could feel now the delicate and awful thrill as the urn and the coffee machine and the whole of a Sèvres breakfast service had crashed down in one stupendous ruin—he remembered the horrified face of the butler, and the screams of a lady guest.

A log broke across and sank into a fluff of white ash. A belated motor-lorry rumbled past the window.

Mr. Bunter, sleeping the sleep of the true and faithful servant, was aroused in the small hours by a hoarse whisper, "Bunter!"

"Yes, my lord," said Bunter, sitting up and switching on the light.

"Put that light out, damn you!" said the voice. "Listen—over there—listen—can't you hear it?"

"It's nothing, my lord," said Mr. Bunter, hastily getting out of bed and catching hold of his master; "it's all right, you get to bed quick and I'll fetch you a drop of bromide. Why, you're all shivering—you've been sitting up too late."

"Hush! no, no—it's the water," said Lord Peter with chattering teeth; "it's up to their waists down there, poor devils. But listen! can't you hear it? Tap, tap, tap—they're mining us—but I don't know where—I can't hear—I can't. Listen, you! There it is again—we must find it—we must stop it. . . . Listen! Oh, my God! I can't hear—I can't hear anything for the noise of the guns. Can't they stop the guns?"

"Oh, dear!" said Mr. Bunter to himself. "No, no—it's all right, Major—don't you worry."

"But I hear it," protested Peter.

"So do I," said Mr. Bunter stoutly; "very good hearing, too, my lord. That's our own sappers at work in the communication trench. Don't you fret about that, sir."

Lord Peter grasped his wrist with a feverish hand.

"Our own sappers," he said; "sure of that?"

"Certain of it," said Mr. Bunter, cheerfully.

"They'll bring down the tower," said Lord Peter.

"To be sure they will," said Mr. Bunter, "and very nice, too. You just come and lay down a bit, sir—they've come to take over this section."

"You're sure it's safe to leave it?" said Lord Peter.

"Safe as houses, sir," said Mr. Bunter, tucking his master's arm under his and walking him off to his bedroom.

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Lord Peter allowed himself to be dosed and put to bed without further resistance. Mr. Bunter, looking singularly un-Bunterlike in striped pyjamas, with his stiff black hair ruffled about his head, sat grimly watching the younger man's sharp cheekbones and the purple stains under his eyes.

"Thought we'd had the last of these attacks," he said. "Been overdoin' of himself. Asleep?" He peered at him anxiously. An affectionate note crept into his voice. "Bloody little fool!" said Sergeant Bunter.

CHAPTER IX

MR. PARKER, SUMMONED THE NEXT MORNING TO 110 Piccadilly, arrived to find the Dowager Duchess in possession. She greeted him charmingly.

"I am going to take this silly boy down to Denver for the week-end," she said, indicating Peter, who was writing and only acknowledged his friend's entrance with a brief nod. "He's been doing too much—running about to Salisbury and places and up till all hours of the night—you really shouldn't encourage him, Mr. Parker, it's very naughty of you—waking poor Bunter up in the middle of the night with scares about Germans, as if that wasn't all over years ago, and he hasn't had an attack for ages, but there! Nerves are such funny things, and Peter always did have nightmares when he was quite a little boy—though very often of course it was only a little pill he wanted; but he was so dreadfully bad in 1918, you know, and I suppose we can't expect to forget all about a great war in a year or two, and, really, I ought to be very thankful with both my boys safe. Still, I think a little peace and quiet at Denver won't do him any harm."

"Sorry you've been having a bad turn, old man," said Parker, vaguely sympathetic; "you're looking a bit seedy."

"Charles," said Lord Peter, in a voice entirely void

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of expression, "I am going away for a couple of days because I can be no use to you in London. What has got to be done for the moment can be much better done by you than by me. I want you to take this"—he folded up his writing and placed it in an envelope—"to Scotland Yard immediately and get it sent out to all the workhouses, infirmaries, police stations, Y.M.C.A.'s and so on in London. It is a description of Thipps's corpse as he was before he was shaved and cleaned up. I want to know whether any man answering to that description has been taken in anywhere, alive or dead, during the last fortnight. You will see Sir Andrew Mackenzie personally, and get the paper sent out at once, by his authority; you will tell him that you have solved the problems of the Levy murder and the Battersea mystery"—Mr. Parker made an astonished noise to which his friend paid no attention—"and you will ask him to have men in readiness with a warrant to arrest a very dangerous and important criminal at any moment on your information. When the replies to this paper come in, you will search for any mention of St. Luke's Hospital, or of any person connected with St. Luke's Hospital, and you will send for me at once.

"Meanwhile you will scrape acquaintance—I don't care how—with one of the students at St. Luke's. Don't march in there blowing about murders and police warrants, or you may find yourself in Queer Street. I shall come up to town as soon as I hear from you, and I shall expect to find a nice ingenuous Sawbones here to meet me." He grinned faintly.

"D'you mean you've got to the bottom of this thing?" asked Parker.

"Yes. I may be wrong. I hope I am, but I know I'm not."

"You won't tell me?"

"D'you know," said Peter, "honestly I'd rather not. I say I *may* be wrong—and I'd feel as if I'd libelled the Archbishop of Canterbury."

"Well, tell me—is it one mystery or two?"

"One."

"You talked of the Levy murder. Is Levy dead?"

"God—yes!" said Peter, with a strong shudder.

The Duchess looked up from where she was reading the *Tatler*.

"Peter," she said, "is that your ague coming on again? Whatever you two are chattering about, you'd better stop it at once if it excites you. Besides, it's about time to be off."

"All right, Mother," said Peter. He turned to Bunter, standing respectfully in the door with an overcoat and suitcase. "You understand what you have to do, don't you?" he said.

"Perfectly, thank you, my lord. The car is just arriving, your Grace."

"With Mrs. Thipps inside it," said the Duchess. "She'll be delighted to see you again, Peter. You remind her so of Mr. Thipps. Good-morning, Bunter."

"Good-morning, your Grace."

Parker accompanied them downstairs.

When they had gone he looked blankly at the paper

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in his hand—then, remembering that it was Saturday and there was need for haste, he hailed a taxi.

“Scotland Yard!” he cried.

Tuesday morning saw Lord Peter and a man in a velveteen jacket swishing merrily through seven acres of turnip-tops, streaked yellow with early frosts. A little way ahead, a sinuous undercurrent of excitement among the leaves proclaimed the unseen yet ever-near presence of one of the Duke of Denver’s setter pups. Presently a partridge flew up with a noise like a police rattle, and Lord Peter accounted for it very creditably for a man who, a few nights before, had been listening to imaginary German sappers. The setter bounded foolishly through the turnips, and fetched back the dead bird.

“Good dog,” said Lord Peter.

Encouraged by this, the dog gave a sudden ridiculous gambol and barked, its ear tossed inside out over its head.

“Heel,” said the man in velveteen, violently. The animal sidled up, ashamed.

“Fool of a dog, that,” said the man in velveteen; “can’t keep quiet. Too nervous, my lord. One of old Black Lass’s pups.”

“Dear me,” said Peter, “is the old dog still going?”

“No, my lord; we had to put her away in the spring.”

Peter nodded. He always proclaimed that he hated the country and was thankful to have nothing to do with the family estates, but this morning he enjoyed

the crisp air and the wet leaves washing darkly over his polished boots. At Denver things moved in an orderly way; no one died sudden and violent deaths except aged setters—and partridges, to be sure. He sniffed up the autumn smell with appreciation. There was a letter in his pocket which had come by the morning post, but he did not intend to read it just yet. Parker had not wired; there was no hurry.

He read it in the smoking-room after lunch. His brother was there, dozing over the *Times*—a good, clean Englishman, sturdy and conventional, rather like Henry VIII in his youth; Gerald, sixteenth Duke of Denver. The Duke considered his cadet rather degenerate, and not quite good form; he disliked his taste for police-court news.

The letter was from Mr. Bunter.

110, Piccadilly,
W.I.

My Lord:

I write (Mr. Bunter had been carefully educated and knew that nothing is more vulgar than a careful avoidance of beginning a letter with the first person singular) as your lordship directed, to inform you of the result of my investigations.

I experienced no difficulty in becoming acquainted with Sir Julian Freke's man-servant. He belongs to the same club as the Hon. Frederick Arbuthnot's man, who is a friend of mine, and was very willing to introduce me. He took me to the club yesterday

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(Sunday) evening, and we dined with the man, whose name is John Cummings, and afterwards I invited Cummings to drinks and a cigar in the flat. Your lordship will excuse me doing this, knowing that it is not my habit, but it has always been my experience that the best way to gain a man's confidence is to let him suppose that one takes advantage of one's employer.

("I always suspected Bunter of being a student of human nature," commented Lord Peter.)

I gave him the best old port ("The deuce you did," said Lord Peter), having heard you and Mr. Arbuthnot talk over it. ("Hum!" said Lord Peter.)

Its effects were quite equal to my expectations as regards the principal matter in hand, but I very much regret to state that the man had so little understanding of what was offered to him that he smoked a cigar with it (one of your lordship's Villar Villars). You will understand that I made no comment on this at the time, but your lordship will sympathize with my feelings. May I take this opportunity of expressing my grateful appreciation of your lordship's excellent taste in food, drink and dress? It is, if I may say so, more than a pleasure—it is an education, to valet and buttle your lordship.

Lord Peter bowed his head gravely.

"What on earth are you doing, Peter, sittin' there noddin' an' grinnin' like a what-you-may-call-it?" demanded the Duke, coming suddenly out of a snooze. "Someone writin' pretty things to you, what?"

"Charming things," said Lord Peter.

The Duke eyed him doubtfully.

"Hope to goodness you don't go and marry a chorus beauty," he muttered inwardly, and returned to the *Times*.

Over dinner I had set myself to discover Cummings's tastes, and found them to run in the direction of the music-hall stage. During his first glass I drew him out in this direction, your lordship having kindly given me opportunities of seeing every performance in London, and I spoke more freely than I should consider becoming in the ordinary way in order to make myself pleasant to him. I may say that his views on women and the stage were such as I should have expected from a man who would smoke with your lordship's port.

With the second glass I introduced the subject of your lordship's inquiries. In order to save time I will write our conversation in the form of a dialogue, as nearly as possible as it actually took place.

Cummings: You seem to get many opportunities of seeing a bit of life, Mr. Bunter.

Bunter: One can always make opportunities if one knows how.

Cummings: Ah, it's very easy for you to talk, Mr. Bunter. You're not married, for one thing.

Bunter: I know better than that, Mr. Cummings.

Cummings: So do I—*now*, when it's too late. (He sighed heavily, and I filled up his glass.)

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Bunter: Does Mrs. Cummings live with you at Battersea?

Cummings: Yes, her and me we do for my governor. Such a life! Not but what there's a char comes in by the day. But what's a char? I can tell you it's dull all by ourselves in that d—d Battersea suburb.

Bunter: Not very convenient for the Halls, of course.

Cummings: I believe you. It's all right for you, here in Piccadilly, right on the spot as you might say. And I daresay your governor's often out all night, eh?

Bunter: Oh, frequently, Mr. Cummings.

Cummings: And I daresay you take the opportunity to slip off yourself every so often, eh?

Bunter: Well, what do *you* think, Mr. Cummings?

Cummings: That's it; there you are! But what's a man to do with a nagging fool of a wife and a blasted scientific doctor for a governor, as sits up all night cutting up dead bodies and experimenting with frogs?

Bunter: Surely he goes out sometimes.

Cummings: Not often. And always back before twelve. And the way he goes on if he rings the bell and you ain't there. I give you *my* word, Mr. Bunter.

Bunter: Temper?

Cummings: No-o-o—but looking through you, nasty-like, as if you was on that operating table of his and he was going to cut you up. Nothing a man could rightly complain of, you understand, Mr. Bunter, just nasty looks. Not but what I will say he's very correct. Apologizes if he's been inconsiderate.

But what's the good of that when he's been and gone and lost you your night's rest?

Bunter: How does he do that? Keeps you up late, you mean?

Cummings: Not him; far from it. House locked up and household to bed at half-past ten. That's his little rule. Not but what I'm glad enough to go as a rule, it's that dreary. Still, when I *do* go to bed I like to go to sleep.

Bunter: What does he do? Walk about the house?

Cummings: Doesn't he? All night. And in and out of the private door to the hospital.

Bunter: You don't mean to say, Mr. Cummings, a great specialist like Sir Julian Freke does night work at the hospital?

Cummings: No, no; he does his own work—research work, as you may say. Cuts people up. They say he's very clever. Could take you or me to pieces like a clock, Mr. Bunter, and put us together again.

Bunter: Do you sleep in the basement, then, to hear him so plain?

Cummings: No; our bedroom's at the top. But, Lord! what's that? He'll bang the door so you can hear him all over the house.

Bunter: Ah, many's the time I've had to speak to Lord Peter about that. And talking all night. And baths.

Cummings: Baths? You may well say that, Mr. Bunter. Baths? Me and my wife sleep next to the cistern-room. Noise fit to wake the dead. All hours.

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When d'you think he chose to have a bath, no later than last Monday night, Mr. Bunter?

Bunter: I've known them to do it at two in the morning, Mr. Cummings.

Cummings: Have you, now? Well, this was at three. Three o'clock in the morning we was waked up. I give you *my* word.

Bunter: You don't say so, Mr. Cummings.

Cummings: He cuts up diseases, you see, Mr. Bunter, and then he don't like to go to bed till he's washed the bacilluses off, if you understand me. Very natural, too, I daresay. But what I say is, the middle of the night's no time for a gentleman to be occupying his mind with diseases.

Bunter: These great men have their own way of doing things.

Cummings: Well, all I can say is, it isn't my way.

(I could believe that, your lordship. Cummings has no signs of greatness about him, and his trousers are not what I would wish to see in a man of his profession.)

Bunter: Is he habitually as late as that, Mr. Cummings?

Cummings: Well, no, Mr. Bunter, I will say, not as a general rule. He apologized, too, in the morning, and said he would have the cistern seen to—and very necessary, in my opinion, for the air gets into the pipes, and the groaning and screeching as goes on is something awful. Just like Niagara, if you follow me, Mr. Bunter, I give you *my* word.

Bunter: Well, that's as it should be, Mr. Cummings.

One can put up with a great deal from a gentleman that has the manners to apologize. And, of course, sometimes they can't help themselves. A visitor will come in unexpectedly and keep them late, perhaps.

Cummings: That's true enough, Mr. Bunter. Now I come to think of it, there *was* a gentleman come in on Monday evening. Not that he came late, but he stayed about an hour, and may have put Sir Julian behindhand.

Bunter: Very likely. Let me give you some more port, Mr. Cummings. Or a little of Lord Peter's old brandy.

Cummings: A little of the brandy, thank you, Mr. Bunter. I suppose you have the run of the cellar here. (He winked at me.)

"Trust me for that," I said, and I fetched him the Napoleon. I assure your lordship it went to my heart to pour it out for a man like that. However, seeing we had got on the right tack, I felt it wouldn't be wasted.

"I'm sure I wish it was always gentlemen that come here at night," I said. (Your lordship will excuse me, I am sure, making such a suggestion.)

("Good God," said Lord Peter, "I wish Bunter was less thorough in his methods.")

Cummings: Oh, he's that sort, his lordship, is he? (He chuckled and poked me. I suppress a portion of his conversation here, which could not fail to be as offensive to your lordship as it was to myself. He went on:) No, it's none of that with Sir Julian. Very few

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visitors at night, and always gentlemen. And going early as a rule, like the one I mentioned.

Bunter: Just as well. There's nothing I find more wearisome, Mr. Cummings, than sitting up to see visitors out.

Cummings: Oh, I didn't see this one out. Sir Julian let him out himself at ten o'clock or thereabouts. I heard the gentleman shout "Good-night" and off he goes.

Bunter: Does Sir Julian always do that?

Cummings: Well, that depends. If he sees visitors downstairs, he lets them out himself: if he sees them upstairs in the library, he rings for me.

Bunter: This was a downstairs visitor, then?

Cummings: Oh, yes. Sir Julian opened the door to him, I remember. He happened to be working in the hall. Though now I come to think of it, they went up to the library afterwards. That's funny. I know they did, because I happened to go up to the hall with coals, and I heard them upstairs. Besides, Sir Julian rang for me in the library a few minutes later. Still, anyway, we heard him go at ten, or it may have been a bit before. He hadn't only stayed about three-quarters of an hour. However, as I was saying, there was Sir Julian banging in and out of the private door all night, and a bath at three in the morning, and up again for breakfast at eight—it beats me. If I had all his money, curse me if I'd go poking about with dead men in the middle of the night. I'd find something better to do with my time, eh, Mr. Bunter—

I need not repeat any more of his conversation, as it became unpleasant and incoherent, and I could not bring him back to the events of Monday night. I was unable to get rid of him till three. He cried on my neck, and said I was the bird, and you were the governor for him. He said that Sir Julian would be greatly annoyed with him for coming home so late, but Sunday night was his night out and if anything was said about it he would give notice. I think he will be ill-advised to do so, as I feel he is not a man I could conscientiously recommend if I were in Sir Julian Freke's place. I noticed that his boot-heels were slightly worn down.

I should wish to add, as a tribute to the great merits of your lordship's cellar, that, although I was obliged to drink a somewhat large quantity both of the Cockburn '68 and the 1800 Napoleon I feel no headache or other ill effects this morning.

Trusting that your lordship is deriving real benefit from the country air, and that the little information I have been able to obtain will prove satisfactory, I remain.

With respectful duty to all the family,

Obediently yours,

MERVYN BUNTER.

"Y'know," said Lord Peter thoughtfully to himself, "I sometimes think Mervyn Bunter's pullin' my leg. What is it, Soames?"

"A telegram, my lord."

"Parker," said Lord Peter, opening it. It said:

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"Description recognised Chelsea Workhouse. Unknown vagrant injured street accident Wednesday week. Died workhouse Monday. Delivered St. Luke's same evening by order Freke. Much puzzled. Parker."

"Hurrray!" said Lord Peter, suddenly sparkling. "I'm glad I've puzzled Parker. Gives me confidence in myself. Makes me feel like Sherlock Holmes. 'Perfectly simple, Watson.' Dash it all, though! this is a beastly business. Still, it's puzzled Parker."

"What's the matter?" asked the Duke, getting up and yawning.

"Marching orders," said Peter, "back to town. Many thanks for your hospitality, old bird—I'm feelin' no end better. Ready to tackle Professor Moriarty or Leon Kestrel or any of 'em."

"I do wish you'd keep out of the police courts," grumbled the Duke. "It makes it so dashed awkward for me, havin' a brother makin' himself conspicuous."

"Sorry, Gerald," said the other; "I know I'm a beastly blot on the 'scutcheon."

"Why can't you marry and settle down and live quietly, doin' something useful?" said the Duke, unappeased.

"Because that was a wash-out as you perfectly well know," said Peter; "besides," he added cheerfully, "I'm bein' no end useful. You may come to want me yourself, you never know. When anybody comes blackmailin' you, Gerald, or your first deserted wife turns up unexpectedly from the West Indies, you'll realize the pull of havin' a private detective in the

family. 'Delicate private business arranged with tact and discretion. Investigations undertaken. Divorce evidence a specialty. Every guarantee!' Come, now."

"Ass!" said Lord Denver, throwing the newspaper violently into his armchair. "When do you want the car?"

"Almost at once. I say, Jerry, I'm taking Mother up with me."

"Why should she be mixed up in it?"

"Well, I want her help."

"I call it most unsuitable," said the Duke.

The Dowager Duchess, however, made no objection.

"I used to know her quite well," she said, "when she was Christine Ford. Why, dear?"

"Because," said Lord Peter, "there's a terrible piece of news to be broken to her about her husband."

"Is he dead, dear?"

"Yes; and she will have to come and identify him."

"Poor Christine."

"Under very revolting circumstances, Mother."

"I'll come with you, dear."

"Thank you, Mother, you're a brick. D'you mind gettin' your things on straight away and comin' up with me? I'll tell you about it in the car."

CHAPTER X

MR. PARKER, A FAITHFUL THOUGH DOUBTING Thomas, had duly secured his medical student: a large young man like an overgrown puppy, with innocent eyes and a freckled face. He sat on the Chesterfield before Lord Peter's library fire, bewildered in equal measure by his errand, his surroundings and the drink which he was absorbing. His palate, though untutored, was naturally a good one, and he realized that even to call this liquid a drink—the term ordinarily used by him to designate cheap whisky, post-war beer or a dubious glass of claret in a Soho restaurant—was a sacrilege; this was something outside normal experience: a genie in a bottle.

The man called Parker, whom he had happened to run across the evening before in the public-house at the corner of Prince of Wales Road, seemed to be a good sort. He had insisted on bringing him round to see this friend of his, who lived splendidly in Piccadilly. Parker was quite understandable; he put him down as a government servant, or perhaps something in the City. The friend was embarrassing; he was a lord, to begin with, and his clothes were a kind of rebuke to the world at large. He talked the most fatuous nonsense, certainly, but in a disconcerting way. He didn't dig into a joke and get all the fun out of it; he made it in passing, so to speak, and skipped

away to something else before your retort was ready. He had a truly terrible man-servant—the sort you read about in books—who froze the marrow in your bones with silent criticism. Parker appeared to bear up under the strain, and this made you think more highly of Parker; he must be more habituated to the surroundings of the great than you would think to look at him. You wondered what the carpet had cost on which Parker was carelessly spilling cigar ash; your father was an upholsterer—Mr. Piggott, of Piggott & Piggott, Liverpool—and you knew enough about carpets to know that you couldn't even guess at the price of this one. When you moved your head on the bulging silk cushion in the corner of the sofa, it made you wish you shaved more often and more carefully. The sofa was a monster—but even so, it hardly seemed big enough to contain you. This Lord Peter was not very tall—in fact, he was rather a small man, but he didn't look undersized. He looked right; he made you feel that to be six-foot-three was rather vulgarly assertive; you felt like Mother's new drawing-room curtains—all over great big blobs. But everybody was very decent to you, and nobody said anything you couldn't understand, or sneered at you. There were some frightfully deep-looking books on the shelves all round, and you had looked into a great folio Dante which was lying on the table, but your hosts were talking quite ordinarily and rationally about the sort of books you read yourself—clinking good love stories and detective stories. You had read a lot of those, and could give an opinion, and they

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listened to what you had to say, though Lord Peter had a funny way of talking about books, too, as if the author had confided in him beforehand, and told him how the story was put together, and which bit was written first. It reminded you of the way old Freke took a body to pieces.

"Thing I object to in detective stories," said Mr. Piggott, "is the way fellows remember every bloomin' thing that's happened to 'em within the last six months. They're always ready with their time of day and was it rainin' or not, and what were they doin' on such an' such a day. Reel it all off like a page of poetry. But one ain't like that in real life, d'you think so, Lord Peter?" Lord Peter smiled, and young Piggott, instantly embarrassed, appealed to his earlier acquaintance. "You know what I mean, Parker. Come now. One day's so like another, I'm sure I couldn't remember—well, I might remember yesterday, p'r'aps, but I couldn't be certain about what I was doin' last week if I was to be shot for it."

"No," said Parker, "and evidence given in police statements sounds just as impossible. But they don't really get it like that, you know. I mean, a man doesn't just say, 'Last Friday I went out at 10 a.m. to buy a mutton chop. As I was turning into Mortimer Street I noticed a girl of about twenty-two with black hair and brown eyes, wearing a green jumper, check skirt, Panama hat and black shoes, riding a Royal Sunbeam Cycle at about ten miles an hour turning the corner by the Church of St. Simon and St. Jude on the wrong side of the road riding

towards the market place!’ It amounts to that, of course, but it’s really wormed out of him by a series of questions.”

“And in short stories,” said Lord Peter, “it has to be put in statement form, because the real conversation would be so long and twaddly and tedious, and nobody would have the patience to read it. Writers have to consider their readers, if any, y’see.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Piggott, “but I bet you most people would find it jolly difficult to remember, even if you asked ’em things. I should—of course, I know I’m a bit of a fool, but then, most people are, ain’t they? You know what I mean. Witnesses ain’t detectives, they’re just average idiots like you and me.”

“Quite so,” said Lord Peter, smiling as the force of the last phrase sank into its unhappy perpetrator; “you mean, if I were to ask you in a general way what you were doin’—say, a week ago today, you wouldn’t be able to tell me a thing about it offhand?”

“No—I’m sure I shouldn’t.” He considered. “No. I was in at the Hospital as usual, I suppose, and, being Tuesday, there’d be a lecture on something or the other—dashed if I know what—and in the evening I went out with Tommy Pringle—no, that must have been Monday—or was it Wednesday? I tell you, I couldn’t swear to anything.”

“You do yourself an injustice,” said Lord Peter gravely. “I’m sure, for instance, you recollect what work you were doing in the dissecting-room on that day, for example.”

“Lord, no! not for certain. I mean, I daresay it

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might come back to me if I thought for a long time, but I wouldn't swear to it in a court of law."

"I'll bet you half-a-crown to sixpence," said Lord Peter, "that you'll remember within five minutes."

"I'm sure I can't."

"We'll see. Do you keep a notebook of the work you do when you dissect? Drawings or anything?"

"Oh, yes."

"Think of that. What's the last thing you did in it?"

"That's easy, because I only did it this morning. It was leg muscles."

"Yes. Who was the subject?"

"An old woman of sorts; died of pneumonia."

"Yes. Turn back the pages of your drawing book in your mind. What came before that?"

"Oh, some animals—still legs; I'm doing motor muscles at present. Yes. That was old Cunningham's demonstration on comparative anatomy. I did rather a good thing of a hare's legs and a frog's, and rudimentary legs on a snake."

"Yes. Which day does Mr. Cunningham lecture?"

"Friday."

"Friday; yes. Turn back again. What comes before that?"

Mr. Piggott shook his head.

"Do your drawings of legs begin on the right-hand page or the left-hand page? Can you see the first drawing?"

"Yes—yes—I can see the date written at the top.

It's a section of a frog's hind leg, on the right-hand page."

"Yes. Think of the open book in your mind's eye. What is opposite to it?"

This demanded some mental concentration.

"Something round—coloured—oh, yes—it's a hand."

"Yes. You went on from the muscles of the hand and arm to leg- and foot-muscles?"

"Yes; that's right. I've got a set of drawings of arms."

"Yes. Did you make those on the Thursday?"

"No; I'm never in the dissecting-room on Thursday."

"On Wednesday, perhaps?"

"Yes; I must have made them on Wednesday. Yes; I did. I went in there after we'd seen those tetanus patients in the morning. I did them on Wednesday afternoon. I know I went back because I wanted to finish 'em. I worked rather hard—for me. That's why I remember."

"Yes; you went back to finish them. When had you begun them, then?"

"Why, the day before."

"The day before. That was Tuesday, wasn't it?"

"I've lost count—yes, the day before Wednesday—yes, Tuesday."

"Yes. Were they a man's arms or a woman's arms?"

"Oh, a man's arms."

"Yes; last Tuesday, a week ago today, you were

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dissecting a man's arms in the dissecting-room. Sixpence, please."

"By Jove!"

"Wait a moment. You know a lot more about it than that. You've no idea how much you know. You know what kind of man he was."

"Oh, I never saw him complete, you know. I got there a bit late that day, I remember. I'd asked for an arm specially, because I was rather weak in arms, and Watts—that's the attendant—had promised to save me one."

"Yes. You have arrived late and found your arm waiting for you. You are dissecting it—taking your scissors and slitting up the skin and pinning it back. Was it very young, fair skin?"

"Oh, no—no. Ordinary skin, I think—with dark hairs on it—yes, that was it."

"Yes. A lean, stringy arm, perhaps, with no extra fat anywhere?"

"Oh, no—I was rather annoyed about that. I wanted a good, muscular arm, but it was rather poorly developed and the fat got in my way."

"Yes; a sedentary man who didn't do much manual work."

"That's right."

"Yes. You dissected the hand, for instance, and made a drawing of it. You would have noticed any hard calluses."

"Oh, there was nothing of that sort."

"No. But should you say it was a young man's arm? Firm young flesh and limber joints?"

"No—no."

"No. Old and stringy, perhaps."

"No. Middle-aged—with rheumatism. I mean, there was a chalky deposit in the joints, and the fingers were a bit swollen."

"Yes. A man about fifty."

"About that."

"Yes. There were other students at work on the same body."

"Oh, yes."

"Yes. And they made all the usual sort of jokes about it."

"I expect so—oh, yes!"

"You can remember some of them. Who is your local funny man, so to speak?"

"Tommy Pringle."

"What was Tommy Pringle's doing?"

"Can't remember."

"Whereabouts was Tommy Pringle working?"

"Over by the instrument cupboard—by sink C."

"Yes. Get a picture of Tommy Pringle in your mind's eye."

Piggott began to laugh.

"I remember now. Tommy Pringle said the old Sheeny—"

"Why did he call him a Sheeny?"

"I don't know. But I know he did."

"Perhaps he looked like it. Did you see his head?"

"No."

"Who had the head?"

"I don't know—oh, yes, I do, though. Old Freke

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bagged the head himself, and little Bouncible Binns was very cross about it, because he'd been promised a head to do with old Scrooger."

"I see. What was Sir Julian doing with the head?"

"He called us up and gave us a jaw on spinal haemorrhage and nervous lesions."

"Yes. Well, go back to Tommy Pringle."

Tommy Pringle's joke was repeated, not without some embarrassment.

"Quite so. Was that all?"

"No. The chap who was working with Tommy said that sort of thing came from over-feeding."

"I deduce that Tommy Pringle's partner was interested in the alimentary canal."

"Yes; and Tommy said, if he'd thought they'd feed you like that he'd go to the workhouse himself."

"Then the man was a pauper from the workhouse?"

"Well, he must have been, I suppose."

"Are workhouse paupers usually fat and well-fed?"

"Well, no—come to think of it, not as a rule."

"In fact, it struck Tommy Pringle and his friend that this was something a little out of the way in a workhouse subject?"

"Yes."

"And if the alimentary canal was so entertaining to these gentlemen, I imagine the subject had come by his death shortly after a full meal."

"Yes—oh, yes—he'd have had to, wouldn't he?"

"Well, I don't know," said Lord Peter. "That's in

your department, you know. That would be your inference, from what they said."

"Oh, yes. Undoubtedly."

"Yes; you wouldn't, for example, expect them to make that observation if the patient had been ill for a long time and fed on slops."

"Of course not."

"Well, you see, you really know a lot about it. On Tuesday week you were dissecting the arm muscles of a rheumatic middle-aged Jew, of sedentary habits, who had died shortly after eating a heavy meal, of some injury producing spinal haemorrhage and nervous lesions, and so forth, and who was presumed to come from the workhouse?"

"Yes."

"And you could swear to those facts, if need were?"

"Well, if you put it in that way, I suppose I could."

"Of course you could."

Mr. Piggott sat for some moments in contemplation.

"I say," he said at last, "I did know all that, didn't I?"

"Oh, yes—you knew it all right—like Socrates's slave."

"Who's he?"

"A person in a book I used to read as a boy."

"Oh—does he come in 'The Last Days of Pompeii'?"

"No—another book—I daresay you escaped it. It's rather dull."

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"I never read much except Henty and Fenimore Cooper at school. . . . But—have I got rather an extra good memory, then?"

"You have a better memory than you credit yourself with."

"Then why can't I remember all the medical stuff? It all goes out of my head like a sieve."

"Well, why can't you?" said Lord Peter, standing on the hearthrug and smiling down at his guest.

"Well," said the young man, "the chaps who examine one don't ask the same sort of questions you do."

"No?"

"No—they leave you to remember all by yourself. And it's beastly hard. Nothing to catch hold of, don't you know? But, I say—how did you know about Tommy Pringle being the funny man and—"

"I didn't, till you told me."

"No; I know. But how did you know he'd be there if you did ask? I mean to say—I say," said Mr. Piggott, who was becoming mellowed by influences themselves not unconnected with the alimentary canal—"I say, are you rather clever, or am I rather stupid?"

"No, no," said Lord Peter, "it's me. I'm always askin' such stupid questions, everybody thinks I must mean somethin' by 'em."

This was too involved for Mr. Piggott.

"Never mind," said Parker, soothingly, "he's always like that. You mustn't take any notice. He can't help it. It's premature senile decay, often ob-

served in the families of hereditary legislators. Go away, Wimsey, and play us the 'Beggar's Opera,' or something."

"That's good enough, isn't it?" said Lord Peter, when the happy Mr. Piggott had been despatched home after a really delightful evening.

"I'm afraid so," said Parker. "But it seems almost incredible."

"There's nothing incredible in human nature," said Lord Peter; "at least, in educated human nature. Have you got that exhumation order?"

"I shall have it tomorrow. I thought of fixing up with the workhouse people for tomorrow afternoon. I shall have to go and see them first."

"Right you are; I'll let my mother know."

"I begin to feel like you, Wimsey, I don't like this job."

"I like it a deal better than I did."

"You are really certain we're not making a mistake?"

Lord Peter had strolled across to the window. The curtain was not perfectly drawn, and he stood gazing out through the gap into lighted Piccadilly. At this he turned round:

"If we are," he said, "we shall know tomorrow, and no harm will have been done. But I rather think you will receive a certain amount of confirmation on your way home. Look here, Parker, d'you know, if I were you I'd spend the night here. There's a spare bedroom; I can easily put you up."

Parker stared at him.

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"Do you mean—I'm likely to be attacked?"

"I think it very likely indeed."

"Is there anybody in the street?"

"Not now; there was half-an-hour ago."

"When Piggott left?"

"Yes."

"I say—I hope the boy is in no danger."

"That's what I went down to see. I don't think so. Fact is, I don't suppose anybody would imagine we'd exactly made a confidant of Piggott. But I think you and I are in danger. You'll stay?"

"I'm damned if I will, Wimsey. Why should I run away?"

"Bosh!" said Peter. "You'd run away all right if you believed me, and why not? You don't believe me. In fact, you're still not certain I'm on the right tack. Go in peace, but don't say I didn't warn you."

"I won't; I'll dictate a message with my dying breath to say I was convinced."

"Well, don't walk—take a taxi."

"Very well, I'll do that."

"And don't let anybody else get into it."

"No."

It was a raw, unpleasant night. A taxi deposited a load of people returning from the theatre at the block of flats next door, and Parker secured it for himself. He was just giving the address to the driver, when a man came hastily running up from a side street. He was in evening dress and an overcoat. He rushed up, signalling frantically.

"Sir—sir!—dear me! why, it's Mr. Parker! How

fortunate! If you would be so kind—summoned from the club—a sick friend—can't find a taxi—everybody going home from the theatre—if I might share your cab—you are returning to Bloomsbury? I want Russell Square—if I might presume—a matter of life and death."

He spoke in hurried gasps, as though he had been running violently and far. Parker promptly stepped out of the taxi.

"Delighted to be of service to you, Sir Julian," he said; "take my taxi. I am going down to Craven Street myself, but I'm in no hurry. Pray make use of the cab."

"It's extremely kind of you," said the surgeon. "I am ashamed—"

"That's all right," said Parker, cheerily. "I can wait." He assisted Freke into the taxi. "What number? 24 Russell Square, driver, and look sharp."

The taxi drove off. Parker remounted the stairs and rang Lord Peter's bell.

"Thanks, old man," he said. "I'll stop the night, after all."

"Come in," said Wimsey.

"Did you see that?" asked Parker.

"I saw something. What happened exactly?"

Parker told his story. "Frankly," he said, "I've been thinking you a bit mad, but now I'm not quite so sure of it."

Peter laughed.

"Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed. Bunter, Mr. Parker will stay the night."

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"Look here, Wimsey, let's have another look at this business. Where's that letter?"

Lord Peter produced Bunter's essay in dialogue. Parker studied it for a short time in silence.

"You know, Wimsey, I'm as full of objections to this idea as an egg is of meat."

"So'm I, old son. That's why I want to dig up our Chelsea pauper. But trot out your objections."

"Well—"

"Well, look here, I don't pretend to be able to fill in all the blanks myself. But here we have two mysterious occurrences in one night, and a complete chain connecting the one with another through one particular person. It's beastly, but it's not unthinkable."

"Yes, I know all that. But there are one or two quite definite stumbling-blocks."

"Yes, I know. But, see here. On the one hand, Levy disappeared after being last seen looking for Prince of Wales Road at nine o'clock. At eight next morning a dead man, not unlike him in general outline, is discovered in a bath in Queen Caroline Mansions. Levy, by Freke's own admission, was going to see Freke. By information received from Chelsea workhouse a dead man, answering to the description of the Battersea corpse in its natural state, was delivered that same day to Freke. We have Levy with a past, and no future, as it were; an unknown vagrant with a future (in the cemetery) and no past, and Freke stands between their future and their past."

"That looks all right—"

"Yes. Now, further: Freke has a motive for getting rid of Levy—an old jealousy."

"Very old—and not much of a motive."

"People have been known to do that sort of thing.* You're thinking that people don't keep up old jealousies for twenty years or so. Perhaps not. Not just primitive, brute jealousy. That means a word and a blow. But the thing that rankles is hurt vanity. That sticks. Humiliation. And we've all got a sore spot we don't like to have touched. I've got it. You've got it. Some blighter said hell knew no fury like a woman scorned. Stickin' it on to women, poor devils. Sex is every man's loco spot—you needn't fidget, you know it's true—he'll take a disappointment, but not a humiliation. I knew a man once who'd been turned down—not too charitably—by a girl he was engaged to. He spoke quite decently about her. I asked what had become of her. 'Oh,' he said, 'she married the other fellow.' And then burst out—couldn't help himself. 'Lord, yes!' he cried. 'To think of it—jilted for a Scotchman!' I don't know why he didn't like Scots, but that was what got him on the raw. Look at Freke. I've read his books. His attacks on his antag-

* Lord Peter was not without authority for his opinion: "With respect to the alleged motive, it is of great importance to see whether there was a motive for committing such a crime, or whether there was not, or whether there is an improbability of its having been committed so strong as not to be overpowered by positive evidence. But *if there be any motive which can be assigned, I am bound to tell you that the inadequacy of that motive is of little importance.* We know, from the experience of criminal courts, that atrocious crimes of this sort have been committed from very slight motives; *not merely from malice and revenge*, but to gain a small pecuniary advantage, and to drive off for a time pressing difficulties."—L. C. J. Campbell, summing up in *Reg. v. Palmer*, Shorthand Report, p. 308 C. C. C., May, 1856, Sess. Pa. 5. (Italics mine. D. L. S.)

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onists are savage. And he's a scientist. Yet he can't bear opposition, even in his work, which is where any first-class man is most sane and open-minded. Do you think he's a man to take a beating from any man on a side-issue? On a man's most sensitive side-issue? People are opinionated about side-issues, you know. I see red if anybody questions my judgment about a book. And Levy—who was nobody twenty years ago—romps in and carries off Freke's girl from under his nose. It isn't the girl Freke would bother about—it's having his aristocratic nose put out of joint by a little Jewish nobody.

"There's another thing. Freke's got another side-issue. He likes crime. In that criminology book of his he gloats over a hardened murderer. I've read it, and I've seen the admiration simply glaring out between the lines whenever he writes about a callous and successful criminal. He reserves his contempt for the victims or the penitents or the men who lose their heads and get found out. His heroes are Edmond de la Pommerais, who persuaded his mistress into becoming an accessory to her own murder, and George Joseph Smith of Brides-in-a-bath fame, who could make passionate love to his wife in the night and carry out his plot to murder her in the morning. After all, he thinks conscience is a sort of vermiform appendix. Chop it out and you'll feel all the better. Freke isn't troubled by the usual conscientious deterrent. Witness his own hand in his books. Now again. The man who went to Levy's house in his place knew the house: Freke knew the house; he was a red-haired

man, smaller than Levy, but not much smaller, since he could wear his clothes without appearing ludicrous: you have seen Freke—you know his height—about five-foot-eleven, I suppose, and his auburn mane; he probably wore surgical gloves: Freke is a surgeon; he was a methodical and daring man: surgeons are obliged to be both daring and methodical. Now take the other side. The man who got hold of the Battersea corpse had to have access to dead bodies. Freke obviously had access to dead bodies. He had to be cool and quick and callous about handling a dead body. Surgeons are all that. He had to be a strong man to carry the body across the roofs and dump it in at Thipps's window. Freke is a powerful man and a member of the Alpine Club. He probably wore surgical gloves and he let the body down from the roof with a surgical bandage. This points to a surgeon again. He undoubtedly lived in the neighbourhood. Freke lives next door. The girl you interviewed heard a bump on the roof of the end house. That is the house next to Freke's. Every time we look at Freke, he leads somewhere, whereas Milligan and Thipps and Crimpleham and all the other people we've honoured with our suspicion simply led nowhere."

"Yes; but it's not quite so simple as you make out. What was Levy doing in that surreptitious way at Freke's on Monday night?"

"Well, you have Freke's explanation."

"Rot, Wimsey. You said yourself it wouldn't do."

"Excellent. It won't do. Therefore Freke was lying.

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Why should he lie about it, unless he had some object in hiding the truth?"

"Well, but why mention it at all?"

"Because Levy, contrary to all expectation, had been seen at the corner of the road. That was a nasty accident for Freke. He thought it best to be beforehand with an explanation—of sorts. He reckoned, of course, on nobody's ever connecting Levy with Battersea Park."

"Well, then, we come back to the first question: Why did Levy go there?"

"I don't know, but he was got there somehow. Why did Freke buy all those Peruvian Oil shares?"

"I don't know," said Parker in his turn.

"Anyway," went on Wimsey, "Freke expected him, and made arrangements to let him in himself, so that Cummings shouldn't see who the caller was."

"But the caller left again at ten."

"Oh, Charles! I did not expect this of you. This is the purest Suggery! Who saw him go? Somebody said 'Good-night' and walked away down the street. And you believe it was Levy because Freke didn't go out of his way to explain that it wasn't."

"D'you mean that Freke walked cheerfully out of the house to Park Lane, and left Levy behind—dead or alive—for Cummings to find?"

"We have Cummings's word that he did nothing of the sort. A few minutes after the steps walked away from the house, Freke rang the library bell and told Cummings to shut up for the night."

"Then—"

"Well—there's a side door to the house, I suppose—in fact, you know there is—Cummings said so—through the hospital."

"Yes—well, where was Levy?"

"Levy went up into the library and never came down. You've been in Freke's library. Where would you have put him?"

"In my bedroom next door."

"Then that's where he did put him."

"But suppose the man went in to turn down the bed?"

"Beds are turned down by the housekeeper, earlier than ten o'clock."

"Yes. . . . But Cummings heard Freke about the house all night."

"He heard him go in and out two or three times. He'd expect him to do that, anyway."

"Do you mean to say Freke got all that job finished before three in the morning?"

"Why not?"

"Quick work."

"Well, call it quick work. Besides, why three? Cummings never saw him again till he called him for eight o'clock breakfast."

"But he was having a bath at three."

"I don't say he didn't get back from Park Lane before three. But I don't suppose Cummings went and looked through the bathroom keyhole to see if he was in the bath."

Parker considered again.

"How about Crimplesham's pince-nez?" he asked.

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"That is a bit mysterious," said Lord Peter.

"And why Thipps's bathroom?"

"Why, indeed? Pure accident, perhaps—or pure devilry."

"Do you think all this elaborate scheme could have been put together in a night, Wimsey?"

"Far from it. It was conceived as soon as that man who bore a superficial resemblance to Levy came into the workhouse. He had several days."

"I see."

"Freke gave himself away at the inquest. He and Grimbold disagreed about the length of the man's illness. If a small man (comparatively speaking) like Grimbold presumes to disagree with a man like Freke, it's because he is sure of his ground."

"Then—if your theory is sound—Freke made a mistake."

"Yes. A very slight one. He was guarding, with unnecessary caution, against starting a train of thought in the mind of anybody—say, the workhouse doctor. Up till then he'd been reckoning on the fact that people don't think a second time about anything (a body, say) that's once been accounted for."

"What made him lose his head?"

"A chain of unforeseen accidents. Levy's having been recognised—my mother's son having foolishly advertised in the *Times* his connection with the Battersea end of the mystery—Detective Parker (whose photograph has been a little prominent in the illustrated press lately) seen sitting next door to the

Duchess of Denver at the inquest. His aim in life was to prevent the two ends of the problem from linking up. And there were two of the links, literally side by side. Many criminals are wrecked by over-caution."

Parker was silent.

CHAPTER XI

"A REGULAR PEA-SOUPER, BY JOVE," SAID LORD PETER.

Parker grunted, and struggled irritably into an overcoat.

"It affords me, if I may say so, the greatest satisfaction," continued the noble lord, "that in a collaboration like ours all the uninteresting and disagreeable routine work is done by you."

Parker grunted again.

"Do you anticipate any difficulty about the warrant?" inquired Lord Peter.

Parker grunted a third time.

"I suppose you've seen to it that all this business is kept quiet?"

"Of course."

"You've muzzled the workhouse people?"

"Of course."

"And the police?"

"Yes."

"Because, if you haven't there'll probably be nobody to arrest."

"My dear Wimsey, do you think I'm a fool?"

"I had no such hope."

Parker grunted finally and departed.

Lord Peter settled down to a perusal of his Dante. It afforded him no solace. Lord Peter was hampered in his career as a private detective by a public-school

education. Despite Parker's admonitions, he was not always able to discount it. His mind had been warped in its young growth by "Raffles" and "Sherlock Holmes," or the sentiments for which they stand. He belonged to a family which had never shot a fox.

"I am an amateur," said Lord Peter.

Nevertheless, while communing with Dante, he made up his mind.

In the afternoon he found himself in Harley Street. Sir Julian Freke might be consulted about one's nerves from two till four on Tuesdays and Fridays. Lord Peter rang the bell.

"Have you an appointment, sir?" inquired the man who opened the door.

"No," said Lord Peter, "but will you give Sir Julian my card? I think it possible he may see me without one."

He sat down in the beautiful room in which Sir Julian's patients awaited his healing counsel. It was full of people. Two or three fashionably dressed women were discussing shops and servants together, and teasing a toy griffon. A big, worried-looking man by himself in a corner looked at his watch twenty times a minute. Lord Peter knew him by sight. It was Wintrington, a millionaire, who had tried to kill himself a few months ago. He controlled the finances of five countries, but he could not control his nerves. The finances of five countries were in Sir Julian Freke's capable hands. By the fireplace sat a soldierly-looking young man, of about Lord Peter's own age.

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His face was prematurely lined and worn; he sat bolt upright, his restless eyes darting in the direction of every slightest sound. On the sofa was an elderly woman of modest appearance, with a young girl. The girl seemed listless and wretched; the woman's look showed deep affection, and anxiety tempered with a timid hope. Close beside Lord Peter was another younger woman, with a little girl, and Lord Peter noticed in both of them the broad cheekbones and beautiful grey, slanting eyes of the Slav. The child, moving restlessly about, trod on Lord Peter's patent-leather toe, and the mother admonished her in French before turning to apologize to Lord Peter.

"Mais je vous en prie, madame," said the young man, "it is nothing."

"She is nervous, pauvre petite," said the young woman.

"You are seeking advice for her?"

"Yes. He is wonderful, the doctor. Figure to yourself, monsieur, she cannot forget, poor child, the things she has seen." She leaned nearer, so that the child might not hear. "We have escaped—from starving Russia—six months ago. I dare not tell you—she has such quick ears, and then, the cries, the tremblings, the convulsions—they all begin again. We were skeletons when we arrived—mon Dieu!—but that is better now. See, she is thin, but she is not starved. She would be fatter but for the nerves that keep her from eating. We who are older, we forget—enfin, on apprend à ne pas y penser—but these chil-

dren! When one is young, monsieur, tout ça impressionne trop."

Lord Peter, escaping from the thralldom of British good form, expressed himself in that language in which sympathy is not condemned to mutism.

"But she is much better, much better," said the mother, proudly; "the great doctor, he does marvels."

"C'est un homme précieux," said Lord Peter.

"Ah, monsieur, c'est un saint qui opère des miracles! Nous prions pour lui, Natasha et moi, tous les jours. N'est-ce pas, chérie? And consider, monsieur, that he does it all, ce grand homme, cet homme illustre, for nothing at all. When we come here, we have not even the clothes upon our backs—we are ruined, famished. Et avec ça que nous sommes de bonne famille—mais hélas! monsieur, en Russie, comme vous savez, ça ne vous vaut que des insultes—des atrocités. Enfin! the great Sir Julian sees us, he says—'Madame, your little girl is very interesting to me. Say no more. I cure her for nothing—pour ses beaux yeux,' a-t-il ajouté en riant. Ah, monsieur, c'est un saint, un véritable saint! and Natasha is much, much better."

"Madame, je vous en félicite."

"And you, monsieur? You are young, well, strong—you also suffer? It is still the war, perhaps?"

"A little remains of shell-shock," said Lord Peter.

"Ah, yes. So many good, brave, young men—"

"Sir Julian can spare you a few minutes, my lord, if you will come in now," said the servant.

Lord Peter bowed to his neighbour, and walked

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across the waiting-room. As the door of the consulting-room closed behind him, he remembered having once gone, disguised, into the staff-room of a German officer. He experienced the same feeling—the feeling of being caught in a trap, and a mingling of bravado and shame.

He had seen Sir Julian Freke several times from a distance, but never close. Now, while carefully and quite truthfully detailing the circumstances of his recent nervous attack, he considered the man before him. A man taller than himself, with immense breadth of shoulder, and wonderful hands. A face beautiful, impassioned and inhuman; fanatical, compelling eyes, bright blue amid the ruddy bush of hair and beard. They were not the cool and kindly eyes of the family doctor, they were the brooding eyes of the inspired scientist, and they searched one through.

"Well," thought Lord Peter, "I shan't have to be explicit, anyhow."

"Yes," said Sir Julian, "yes. You had been working too hard. Puzzling your mind. Yes. More than that, perhaps—troubling your mind, shall we say?"

"I found myself faced with a very alarming contingency."

"Yes. Unexpectedly, perhaps."

"Very unexpected indeed."

"Yes. Following on a period of mental and physical strain."

"Well—perhaps. Nothing out of the way."

"Yes. The unexpected contingency was—personal to yourself?"

"It demanded an immediate decision as to my own actions—yes, in that sense it was certainly personal."

"Quite so. You would have to assume some responsibility, no doubt."

"A very grave responsibility."

"Affecting others besides yourself?"

"Affecting one other person vitally, and a very great number indirectly."

"Yes. The time was night. You were sitting in the dark?"

"Not at first. I think I put the light out afterwards."

"Quite so—that action would naturally suggest itself to you. Were you warm?"

"I think the fire had died down. My man tells me that my teeth were chattering when I went in to him."

"Yes. You live in Piccadilly?"

"Yes."

"Heavy traffic sometimes goes past during the night, I expect."

"Oh, frequently."

"Just so. Now this decision you refer to—you had taken that decision."

"Yes."

"Your mind was made up?"

"Oh, yes."

"You had decided to take the action, whatever it was."

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"Yes."

"Yes. It involved perhaps a period of inaction."

"Of comparative inaction—yes."

"Of suspense, shall we say?"

"Yes—of suspense, certainly."

"Possibly of some danger?"

"I don't know that that was in my mind at the time."

"No—it was a case in which you could not possibly consider yourself."

"If you like to put it that way."

"Quite so. Yes. You had these attacks frequently in 1918?"

"Yes—I was very ill for some months."

"Quite. Since then they have recurred less frequently?"

"Much less frequently."

"Yes—when did the last occur?"

"About nine months ago."

"Under what circumstances?"

"I was being worried by certain family matters. It was a question of deciding about some investments, and I was largely responsible."

"Yes. You were interested last year, I think, in some police case?"

"Yes—in the recovery of Lord Attenbury's emerald necklace."

"That involved some severe mental exercise?"

"I suppose so. But I enjoyed it very much."

"Yes. Was the exertion of solving the problem attended by any bad results physically?"

"None."

"No. You were interested, but not distressed."

"Exactly."

"Yes. You have been engaged in other investigations of the kind?"

"Yes. Little ones."

"With bad results for your health?"

"Not a bit of it. On the contrary. I took up these cases as a sort of distraction. I had a bad knock just after the war, which didn't make matters any better for me, don't you know."

"Ah! you are not married?"

"No."

"No. Will you allow me to make an examination? Just come a little nearer to the light. I want to see your eyes. Whose advice have you had till now?"

"Sir James Hodges'."

"Ah! yes—he was a sad loss to the medical profession. A really great man—a true scientist. Yes. Thank you. Now I should like to try you with this little invention."

"What's it do?"

"Well—it tells me about your nervous reactions. Will you sit here?"

The examination that followed was purely medical. When it was concluded, Sir Julian said:

"Now, Lord Peter, I'll tell you about yourself in quite untechnical language—"

"Thanks," said Peter, "that's kind of you. I'm an awful fool about long words."

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"Yes. Are you fond of private theatricals, Lord Peter?"

"Not particularly," said Peter, genuinely surprised. "Awful bore as a rule. Why?"

"I thought you might be," said the specialist, drily. "Well, now. You know quite well that the strain you put on your nerves during the war has left its mark on you. It has left what I may call old wounds in your brain. Sensations received by your nerve-endings sent messages to your brain, and produced minute physical changes there—changes we are only beginning to be able to detect, even with our most delicate instruments. These changes in their turn set up sensations; or I should say, more accurately, that sensations are the names we give to these changes of tissue when we perceive them: we call them horror, fear, sense of responsibility and so on."

"Yes, I follow you."

"Very well. Now, if you stimulate those damaged places in your brain again, you run the risk of opening up the old wounds. I mean, that if you get nerve-sensations of any kind producing the reactions which we call horror, fear, and sense of responsibility, they may go on to make disturbance right along the old channel, and produce in their turn physical changes which you will call by the names you were accustomed to associate with them—dread of German mines, responsibility for the lives of your men, strained attention and the inability to distinguish small sounds through the overpowering noise of guns."

"I see."

"This effect would be increased by extraneous circumstances producing other familiar physical sensations—night, cold or the rattling of heavy traffic, for instance."

"Yes."

"Yes. The old wounds are nearly healed, but not quite. The ordinary exercise of your mental faculties has no bad effect. It is only when you excite the injured part of your brain."

"Yes, I see."

"Yes. You must avoid these occasions. You must learn to be irresponsible, Lord Peter."

"My friends say I'm only too irresponsible already."

"Very likely. A sensitive nervous temperament often appears so, owing to its mental nimbleness."

"Oh!"

"Yes. This particular responsibility you were speaking of still rests upon you?"

"Yes, it does."

"You have not yet completed the course of action on which you have decided?"

"Not yet."

"You feel bound to carry it through?"

"Oh, yes—I can't back out of it now."

"No. You are expecting further strain?"

"A certain amount."

"Do you expect it to last much longer?"

"Very little longer now."

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"Ah! Your nerves are not all they should be."

"No?"

"No. Nothing to be alarmed about, but you must exercise care while undergoing this strain, and afterwards you should take a complete rest. How about a voyage in the Mediterranean or the South Seas or somewhere?"

"Thanks. I'll think about it."

"Meanwhile, to carry you over the immediate trouble I will give you something to strengthen your nerves. It will do you no permanent good, you understand, but it will tide you over the bad time. And I will give you a prescription."

"Thank you."

Sir Julian got up and went into a small surgery leading out of the consulting-room. Lord Peter watched him moving about—boiling something and writing. Presently he returned with a paper and a hypodermic syringe.

"Here is the prescription. And now, if you will just roll up your sleeve, I will deal with the necessity of the immediate moment."

Lord Peter obediently rolled up his sleeve. Sir Julian Freke selected a portion of his forearm and anointed it with iodine.

"What's that you're goin' to stick into me. Bugs?"

The surgeon laughed.

"Not exactly," he said. He pinched up a portion of flesh between his finger and thumb. "You've had this kind of thing before, I expect."

"Oh, yes," said Lord Peter. He watched the cool fingers, fascinated, and the steady approach of the needle. "Yes—I've had it before—and, d'you know—I don't care frightfully about it."

He had brought up his right hand, and it closed over the surgeon's wrist like a vice.

The silence was like a shock. The blue eyes did not waver; they burned down steadily upon the heavy white lids below them. Then these slowly lifted; the grey eyes met the blue—coldly, steadily—and held them.

When lovers embrace, there seems no sound in the world but their own breathing. So the two men breathed face to face.

"As you like, of course, Lord Peter," said Sir Julian, courteously.

"Afraid I'm rather a silly ass," said Lord Peter, "but I never could abide these little gadgets. I had one once that went wrong and gave me a rotten bad time. They make me a bit nervous."

"In that case," replied Sir Julian, "it would certainly be better not to have the injection. It might rouse up just those sensations which we are desirous of avoiding. You will take the prescription, then, and do what you can to lessen the immediate strain as far as possible."

"Oh, yes—I'll take it easy, thanks," said Lord Peter. He rolled his sleeve down neatly. "I'm much obliged to you. If I have any further trouble I'll look in again."

"Do—do—" said Sir Julian, cheerfully. "Only

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make an appointment another time. I'm rather rushed these days. I hope your mother is quite well. I saw her the other day at that Battersea inquest. You should have been there. It would have interested you."

CHAPTER XII

THE VILE, RAW FOG TORE YOUR THROAT AND RAV-
aged your eyes. You could not see your feet. You
stumbled in your walk over poor men's graves.

The feel of Parker's old trench-coat beneath your
fingers was comforting. You had felt it in worse
places. You clung on now for fear you should get
separated. The dim people moving in front of you
were like Brocken spectres.

"Take care, gentlemen," said a toneless voice out
of the yellow darkness, "there's an open grave just
hereabouts."

You bore away to the right, and floundered in a
mass of freshly turned clay.

"Hold up, old man," said Parker.

"Where is Lady Levy?"

"In the mortuary; the Duchess of Denver is with
her. Your mother is wonderful, Peter."

"Isn't she?" said Lord Peter.

A dim blue light carried by somebody ahead wav-
ered and stood still.

"Here you are," said a voice.

Two Dantesque shapes with pitchforks loomed
up.

"Have you finished?" asked somebody.

"Nearly done, sir." The demons fell to work again
with the pitchforks—no, spades.

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Somebody sneezed. Parker located the sneezer and introduced him.

"Mr. Levett represents the Home Secretary. Lord Peter Wimsey. We are sorry to drag you out on such a day, Mr. Levett."

"It's all in the day's work," said Mr. Levett, hoarsely. He was muffled to the eyes.

The sound of the spades for many minutes. An iron noise of tools thrown down. Demons stooping and straining.

A black-bearded spectre at your elbow. Introduced. The Master of the Workhouse.

"A very painful matter, Lord Peter. You will forgive me for hoping you and Mr. Parker may be mistaken."

"I should like to be able to hope so too."

Something heaving, straining, coming up out of the ground.

"Steady, men. This way. Can you see? Be careful of the graves—they lie pretty thick hereabouts. Are you ready?"

"Right you are, sir. You go on with the lantern. We can follow you."

Lumbering footsteps. Catch hold of Parker's trench-coat again. "That you, old man? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Levett—thought you were Parker."

"Hullo, Wimsey—here you are."

More graves. A headstone shouldered crookedly aslant. A trip and jerk over the edge of the rough grass. The squeal of gravel under your feet.

"This way, gentlemen, mind the step."

The mortuary. Raw red brick and sizzling gas-jets. Two women in black, and Dr. Grimbold. The coffin laid on the table with a heavy thump.

"'Ave you got that there screw-driver, Bill? Thank 'ee. Be keerful wi' the chisel now. Not much substance to these 'ere boards, sir."

Several long creaks. A sob. The Duchess's voice, kind but peremptory.

"Hush, Christine. You mustn't cry."

A mutter of voices. The lurching departure of the Dante demons—good, decent demons in corduroy.

Dr. Grimbold's voice—cool and detached as if in the consulting room.

"Now—have you got that lamp, Mr. Wingate? Thank you. Yes, here on the table, please. Be careful not to catch your elbow in the flex, Mr. Levett. It would be better, I think, if you came on this side. Yes—yes—thank you. That's excellent."

The sudden brilliant circle of an electric lamp over the table. Dr. Grimbold's beard and spectacles. Mr. Levett blowing his nose. Parker bending close. The Master of the Workhouse peering over him. The rest of the room in the enhanced dimness of the gas-jets and the fog.

A low murmur of voices. All heads bent over the work.

Dr. Grimbold again—beyond the circle of the lamplight.

"We don't want to distress you unnecessarily, Lady Levy. If you will just tell us what to look for—the—?

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Yes, yes, certainly—and—yes—stopped with gold? Yes—the lower jaw, the last but one on the right? Yes—no teeth missing—no—yes? What kind of a mole? Yes—just over the left breast? Oh, I beg your pardon, just under—yes—appendicitis? Yes—a long one—yes—in the middle? Yes, I quite understand—a scar on the arm? Yes, I don't know if we shall be able to find that—yes—any little constitutional weakness that might—? Oh, yes—arthritis—yes—thank you, Lady Levy—that's very clear. Don't come unless I ask you to. Now, Wingate."

A pause. A murmur. "Pulled out? After death, you think—well, so do I. Where is Dr. Colegrove? You attended this man in the workhouse? Yes. Do you recollect—? No? You're quite certain about that? Yes—we mustn't make a mistake, you know. Yes, but there are reasons why Sir Julian can't be present; I'm asking *you*, Dr. Colegrove. Well, you're certain—that's all I want to know. Just bring the light closer, Mr. Wingate, if you please. These miserable shells let the damp in so quickly. Ah! what do you make of this? Yes—yes—well, that's rather unmistakable, isn't it? Who did the head? Oh, Freke—of course. I was going to say they did good work at St. Luke's. Beautiful, isn't it, Dr. Colegrove? A wonderful surgeon—I saw him when he was at Guy's. Oh, no, gave it up years ago. Nothing like keeping your hand in. Ah—yes, undoubtedly that's it. Have you a towel handy, sir? Thank you. Over the head, if you please—I think we might have another here. Now, Lady Levy—I am going to ask you to look at

a scar, and see if you recognise it. I'm sure you are going to help us by being very firm. Take your time—you won't see anything more than you absolutely must."

"Lucy, don't leave me."

"No, dear."

A space cleared at the table. The lamplight on the Duchess's white hair.

"Oh, yes—oh, yes! No, no—I couldn't be mistaken. There's that funny little kink in it. I've seen it hundreds of times. Oh, Lucy—Reuben!"

"Only a moment more, Lady Levy. The mole—"

"I—I think so—oh, yes, that is the very place."

"Yes. And the scar—was it three-cornered, just above the elbow?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"Is this it?"

"Yes—yes—"

"I must ask you definitely, Lady Levy. Do you, from these three marks identify the body as that of your husband?"

"Oh! I must, mustn't I? Nobody else could have them just the same in just those places? It is my husband. It is Reuben. Oh—"

"Thank you, Lady Levy. You have been very brave and very helpful."

"But—I don't understand yet. How did he come here? Who did this dreadful thing?"

"Hush, dear," said the Duchess; "the man is going to be punished."

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"Oh, but—how cruel! Poor Reuben! Who could have wanted to hurt him? Can I see his face?"

"No, dear," said the Duchess. "That isn't possible. Come away—you mustn't distress the doctors and people."

"No—no—they've all been so kind. Oh, Lucy!"

"We'll go home, dear. You don't want us any more, Dr. Grimbolt?"

"No, Duchess, thank you. We are very grateful to you and to Lady Levy for coming."

There was a pause, while the two women went out, Parker, collected and helpful, escorting them to their waiting car. Then Dr. Grimbolt again:

"I think Lord Peter Wimsey ought to see—the correctness of his deductions—Lord Peter—very painful—you may wish to see—yes, I was uneasy at the inquest—yes—Lady Levy—remarkably clear evidence—yes—most shocking case—ah, here's Mr. Parker—you and Lord Peter Wimsey entirely justified—do I really understand—? Really? I can hardly believe it—so distinguished a man—as you say, when a great brain turns to crime—yes—look here! Marvellous work—marvellous—somewhat obscured by this time, of course—but the most beautiful sections—here, you see, the left hemisphere—and here—through the corpus striatum—here again—the very track of the damage done by the blow—wonderful—guessed it—saw the effect of the blow as he struck it, you know—ah, I should like to see *his* brain, Mr. Parker—and to think that—heavens, Lord Peter, you don't know what a blow you have struck at the whole

profession—the whole civilized world! Oh, my dear sir! Can you ask me? My lips are sealed of course—all our lips are sealed.”

The way back through the burial ground. Fog again, and the squeal of wet gravel.

“Are your men ready, Charles?”

“They have gone. I sent them off when I saw Lady Levy to the car.”

“Who is with them?”

“Sugg.”

“Sugg?”

“Yes—poor devil. They’ve had him up on the mat at headquarters for bungling the case. All that evidence of Thipps’s about the night club was corroborated, you know. That girl he gave the gin-and-bitters to was caught, and came and identified him, and they decided their case wasn’t good enough, and let Thipps and the Horrocks girl go. Then they told Sugg he had overstepped his duty and ought to have been more careful. So he ought, but he can’t help being a fool. I was sorry for him. It may do him some good to be in at the death. After all, Peter, you and I had special advantages.”

“Yes. Well, it doesn’t matter. Whoever goes won’t get there in time. Sugg’s as good as another.”

But Sugg—an experience rare in his career—was in time.

Parker and Lord Peter were at 110 Piccadilly. Lord Peter was playing Bach and Parker was reading Origen when Sugg was announced.

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"We've got our man, sir," said he.

"Good God!" said Peter. "Alive?"

"We were just in time, my lord. We rang the bell and marched straight up past his man to the library. He was sitting there doing some writing. When we came in, he made a grab for his hypodermic, but we were too quick for him, my lord. We didn't mean to let him slip through our hands, having got so far. We searched him thoroughly and marched him off."

"He is actually in gaol, then?"

"Oh, yes—safe enough—with two warders to see he doesn't make away with himself."

"You surprise me, Inspector. Have a drink."

"Thank you, my lord. I may say that I'm very grateful to you—this case was turning out a pretty bad egg for me. If I was rude to your lordship—"

"Oh, it's all right, Inspector," said Lord Peter, hastily. "I don't see how you could possibly have worked it out. I had the good luck to know something about it from other sources."

"That's what Freke says." Already the great surgeon was a common criminal in the inspector's eyes—a mere surname. "He was writing a full confession when we got hold of him, addressed to your lordship. The police will have to have it, of course, but seeing it's written for you, I brought it along for you to see first. Here it is."

He handed Lord Peter a bulky document.

"Thanks," said Peter. "Like to hear it, Charles?"

"Rather."

Accordingly Lord Peter read it aloud.

CHAPTER XIII

DEAR LORD PETER—WHEN I WAS A YOUNG MAN I used to play chess with an old friend of my father's. He was a very bad, and a very slow, player, and he could never see when a checkmate was inevitable, but insisted on playing every move out. I never had any patience with that kind of attitude, and I will freely admit now that the game is yours. I must either stay at home and be hanged or escape abroad and live in an idle and insecure obscurity. I prefer to acknowledge defeat.

If you have read my book on "Criminal Lunacy," you will remember that I wrote: "In the majority of cases, the criminal betrays himself by some abnormality attendant upon this pathological condition of the nervous tissues. His mental instability shows itself in various forms: an overweening vanity, leading him to brag of his achievement; a disproportionate sense of the importance of the offence, resulting from the hallucination of religion, and driving him to confession; egomania, producing the sense of horror or conviction of sin, and driving him to headlong flight without covering his tracks; a reckless confidence, resulting in the neglect of the most ordinary precautions, as in the case of Henry Wainwright, who left a boy in charge of the murdered woman's remains while he went to call a cab, or on the other

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hand, a nervous distrust of apperceptions in the past, causing him to revisit the scene of the crime to assure himself that all traces have been as safely removed as *his own judgment knows them to be*. I will not hesitate to assert that a perfectly sane man, not intimidated by religious or other delusions, could always render himself perfectly secure from detection, provided, that is, that the crime were sufficiently premeditated and that he were not pressed for time or thrown out in his calculations by purely fortuitous coincidence.

You know as well as I do, how far I have made this assertion good in practice. The two accidents which betrayed me, I could not by any possibility have foreseen. The first was the chance recognition of Levy by the girl in the Battersea Park Road, which suggested a connection between the two problems. The second was that Thipps should have arranged to go down to Denver on the Tuesday morning, thus enabling your mother to get word of the matter through to you before the body was removed by the police and to suggest a motive for the murder out of what she knew of my previous personal history. If I had been able to destroy these two accidentally forged links of circumstance, I will venture to say that you would never have so much as suspected me, still less obtained sufficient evidence to convict.

Of all human emotions, except perhaps those of hunger and fear, the sexual appetite produces the most violent, and, under some circumstances, the most persistent reactions; I think, however, I am

right in saying that at the time when I wrote my book, my original sensual impulse to kill Sir Reuben Levy had already become profoundly modified by my habits of thought. To the animal lust to slay and the primitive human desire for revenge, there was added the rational intention of substantiating my own theories for the satisfaction of myself and the world. If all had turned out as I had planned, I should have deposited a sealed account of my experiment with the Bank of England, instructing my executors to publish it after my death. Now that accident has spoiled the completeness of my demonstration, I entrust the account to you, whom it cannot fail to interest, with the request that you will make it known among scientific men, in justice to my professional reputation.

The really essential factors of success in any undertaking are money and opportunity, and as a rule, the man who can make the first can make the second. During my early career, though I was fairly well-off, I had not absolute command of circumstance. Accordingly I devoted myself to my profession, and contented myself with keeping up a friendly connection with Reuben Levy and his family. This enabled me to remain in touch with his fortunes and interests, so that, when the moment for action should arrive, I might know what weapons to use.

Meanwhile, I carefully studied criminology in fiction and fact—my work on “Criminal Lunacy” was a side-product of this activity—and saw how, in every murder, the real crux of the problem was the

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disposal of the body. As a doctor, the means of death were always ready to my hand, and I was not likely to make any error in that connection. Nor was I likely to betray myself on account of any illusory sense of wrong-doing. The sole difficulty would be that of destroying all connection between my personality and that of the corpse. You will remember that Michael Finsbury, in Stevenson's entertaining romance, observes: "What hangs people is the unfortunate circumstance of guilt." It became clear to me that the mere leaving about of a superfluous corpse could convict nobody, provided that nobody was guilty in connection *with that particular corpse*. Thus the idea of substituting the one body for the other was early arrived at, though it was not till I obtained the practical direction of St. Luke's Hospital that I found myself perfectly unfettered in the choice and handling of dead bodies. From this period on, I kept a careful watch on all the material brought in for dissection.

My opportunity did not present itself until the week before Sir Reuben's disappearance, when the medical officer at the Chelsea workhouse sent word to me that an unknown vagrant had been injured that morning by the fall of a piece of scaffolding, and was exhibiting some very interesting nervous and cerebral reactions. I went round and saw the case, and was immediately struck by the man's strong superficial resemblance to Sir Reuben. He had been heavily struck on the back of the neck, dislocating the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae and heavily bruising the

spinal cord. It seemed highly unlikely that he could ever recover, either mentally or physically, and in any case there appeared to me to be no object in indefinitely prolonging so unprofitable an existence. He had obviously been able to support life until recently, as he was fairly well nourished, but the state of his feet and clothing showed that he was unemployed, and under present conditions he was likely to remain so. I decided that he would suit my purpose very well, and immediately put in train certain transactions in the City which I had already sketched out in my own mind. In the meantime, the reactions mentioned by the workhouse doctor were interesting, and I made careful studies of them, and arranged for the delivery of the body to the hospital when I should have completed my preparations.

On the Thursday and Friday of that week I made private arrangements with various brokers to buy the stock of certain Peruvian Oil-fields, which had gone down almost to waste-paper. This part of my experiment did not cost me very much, but I contrived to arouse considerable curiosity, and even a mild excitement. At this point I was of course careful not to let my name appear. The incidence of Saturday and Sunday gave me some anxiety lest my man should after all die before I was ready for him, but by the use of saline injections I contrived to keep him alive and, late on Sunday night, he even manifested disquieting symptoms of at any rate a partial recovery.

On Monday morning the market in Peruvians opened briskly. Rumours had evidently got about

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that somebody knew something, and this day I was not the only buyer in the market. I bought a couple of hundred more shares in my own name, and left the matter to take care of itself. At lunch time I made my arrangements to run into Levy accidentally at the corner of the Mansion House. He expressed (as I expected) his surprise at seeing me in that part of London. I simulated some embarrassment and suggested that we should lunch together. I dragged him to a place a bit off the usual beat, and there ordered a good wine and drank of it as much as he might suppose sufficient to induce a confidential mood. I asked him how things were going on 'Change. He said, "Oh, all right," but appeared a little doubtful, and asked me whether I did anything in that way. I said I had a little flutter occasionally, and that, as a matter of fact, I'd been put on to rather a good thing. I glanced round apprehensively at this point, and shifted my chair nearer to his.

"I suppose you don't know anything about Peruvian Oil, do you?" he said.

I started and looked round again, and leaning across to him, said, dropping my voice:

"Well, I do, as a matter of fact, but I don't want it to get about. I stand to make a good bit on it."

"But I thought the thing was hollow," he said; "it hasn't paid a dividend for umpteen years."

"No," I said, "it hasn't, but it's going to. I've got inside information." He looked a bit unconvinced, and I emptied off my glass, and edged right up to his ear.

"Look here," I said, "I'm not giving this away to everyone, but I don't mind doing you and Christine a good turn. You know, I've always kept a soft place in my heart for her, ever since the old days. You got in ahead of me that time, and now it's up to me to heap coals of fire on you both."

I was a little excited by this time, and he thought I was drunk.

"It's very kind of you, old man," he said, "but I'm a cautious bird, you know, always was. I'd like a bit of proof."

And he shrugged up his shoulders and looked like a pawnbroker.

"I'll give it to you," I said, "but it isn't safe here. Come round to my place tonight after dinner, and I'll show you the report."

"How d'you get hold of it?" said he.

"I'll tell you tonight," said I. "Come round after dinner—any time after nine, say."

"To Harley Street?" he asked, and I saw that he meant coming.

"No," I said, "to Battersea—Prince of Wales Road; I've got some work to do at the hospital. And look here," I said, "don't you let on to a soul that you're coming. I bought a couple of hundred shares today, in my own name, and people are sure to get wind of it. If we're known to be about together, someone'll twig something. In fact, it's anything but safe talking about it in this place."

"All right," he said, "I won't say a word to any-

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body. I'll turn up about nine o'clock. You're sure it's a sound thing?"

"It can't go wrong," I assured him. And I meant it.

We parted after that, and I went round to the workhouse. My man had died at about eleven o'clock. I had seen him just after breakfast, and was not surprised. I completed the usual formalities with the workhouse authorities, and arranged for his delivery at the hospital at about seven o'clock.

In the afternoon, as it was not one of my days to be in Harley Street, I looked up an old friend who lives close to Hyde Park, and found that he was just off to Brighton on some business or other. I had tea with him, and saw him off by the 5.35 from Victoria. On issuing from the barrier it occurred to me to purchase an evening paper, and I thoughtlessly turned my steps to the bookstall. The usual crowds were rushing to catch suburban trains home, and on moving away I found myself involved in a contrary stream of travellers coming up out of the Underground, or bolting from all sides for the 5.45 to Battersea Park and Wandsworth Common. I disengaged myself after some buffeting and went home in a taxi; and it was not till I was safely seated there that I discovered somebody's gold-rimmed pince-nez involved in the astrakhan collar of my overcoat. The time from 6.15 to seven I spent concocting something to look like a bogus report for Sir Reuben.

At seven I went through to the hospital, and found the workhouse van just delivering my subject at the

side door. I had him taken straight up to the theatre, and told the attendant, William Watts, that I intended to work there that night. I told him I would prepare the body myself—the injection of a preservative would have been a most regrettable complication. I sent him about his business, and then went home and had dinner. I told my man that I should be working in the hospital that evening, and that he could go to bed at 10.30 as usual, as I could not tell whether I should be late or not. He is used to my erratic ways. I only keep two servants in the Battersea house—the man-servant and his wife, who cooks for me. The rougher domestic work is done by a charwoman, who sleeps out. The servants' bedroom is at the top of the house, overlooking Prince of Wales Road.

As soon as I had dined I established myself in the hall with some papers. My man had cleared dinner by a quarter past eight, and I told him to give me the syphon and tantalus; and sent him downstairs. Levy rang the bell at twenty minutes past nine, and I opened the door to him myself. My man appeared at the other end of the hall, but I called to him that it was all right, and he went away. Levy wore an overcoat with evening dress and carried an umbrella. "Why, how wet you are!" I said. "How did you come?" "By 'bus," he said, "and the fool of a conductor forgot to put me down at the end of the road. It's pouring cats and dogs and pitch-dark—I couldn't see where I was." I was glad he hadn't taken a taxi, but I had rather reckoned on his not doing so.

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"Your little economies will be the death of you one of these days," I said. I was right there, but I hadn't reckoned on their being the death of me as well. I say again, I could not have foreseen it.

I sat him down by the fire, and gave him a whisky. He was in high spirits about some deal in Argentines he was bringing off the next day. We talked money for about a quarter of an hour and then he said:

"Well, how about this Peruvian mare's-nest of yours?"

"It's no mare's-nest," I said; "come and have a look at it."

I took him upstairs into the library, and switched on the centre light and the reading lamp on the writing table. I gave him a chair at the table with his back to the fire, and fetched the papers I had been faking, out of the safe. He took them, and began to read them, poking over them in his short-sighted way, while I mended the fire. As soon as I saw his head in a favourable position I struck him heavily with the poker, just over the fourth cervical. It was delicate work calculating the exact force necessary to kill him without breaking the skin, but my professional experience was useful to me. He gave one loud gasp, and tumbled forward on to the table quite noiselessly. I put the poker back, and examined him. His neck was broken, and he was quite dead. I carried him into my bedroom and undressed him. It was about ten minutes to ten when I had finished. I put him away under my bed, which had been turned down for the night, and cleared up the papers in the

library. Then I went downstairs, took Levy's umbrella, and let myself out at the hall door, shouting "Good-night" loudly enough to be heard in the basement if the servants should be listening. I walked briskly away down the street, went in by the hospital side door, and returned to the house noiselessly by way of the private passage. It would have been awkward if anybody had seen me then, but I leaned over the back stairs and heard the cook and her husband still talking in the kitchen. I slipped back into the hall, replaced the umbrella in the stand, cleared up my papers there, went up into the library and rang the bell. When the man appeared I told him to lock up everything except the private door to the hospital. I waited in the library until he had done so, and about 10.30 I heard both servants go up to bed. I waited a quarter of an hour longer and then went through to the dissecting-room. I wheeled one of the stretcher tables through the passage to the house door, and then went to fetch Levy. It was a nuisance having to get him downstairs, but I had not liked to make away with him in any of the ground-floor rooms, in case my servant should take a fancy to poke his head in during the few minutes that I was out of the house, or while locking up. Besides, that was a flea-bite to what I should have to do later. I put Levy on the table, wheeled him across to the hospital and substituted him for my interesting pauper. I was sorry to have to abandon the idea of getting a look at the latter's brain, but I could not afford to incur suspicion. It was still rather early, so I knocked down a

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few minutes getting Levy ready for dissection. Then I put my pauper on the table and trundled him over to the house. It was now five past eleven, and I thought I might conclude that the servants were in bed. I carried the body into my bedroom. He was rather heavy, but less so than Levy, and my Alpine experience had taught me how to handle bodies. It is as much a matter of knack as of strength, and I am, in any case, a powerful man for my height. I put the body into the bed—not that I expected anyone to look in during my absence, but if they should they might just as well see me apparently asleep in bed. I drew the clothes a little over his head, stripped, and put on Levy's clothes, which were fortunately a little big for me everywhere, not forgetting to take his spectacles, watch and other oddments. At a little before half-past eleven I was in the road looking for a cab. People were just beginning to come home from the theatre, and I easily secured one at the corner of Prince of Wales Road. I told the man to drive me to Hyde Park Corner. There I got out, tipped him well, and asked him to pick me up again at the same place in an hour's time. He assented with an understanding grin, and I walked on up Park Lane. I had my own clothes with me in a suitcase, and carried my own overcoat and Levy's umbrella. When I got to No. 9A there were lights in some of the top windows. I was very nearly too early, owing to the old man's having sent the servants to the theatre. I waited about for a few minutes, and heard it strike the quarter past mid-

night. The lights were extinguished shortly after, and I let myself in with Levy's key.

It had been my original intention, when I thought over this plan of murder, to let Levy disappear from the study or the dining-room, leaving only a heap of clothes on the hearth-rug. The accident of my having been able to secure Lady Levy's absence from London, however, made possible a solution more misleading, though less pleasantly fantastic. I turned on the hall light, hung up Levy's wet overcoat and placed his umbrella in the stand. I walked up noisily and heavily to the bedroom and turned off the light by the duplicate switch on the landing. I knew the house well enough, of course. There was no chance of my running into the man-servant. Old Levy was a simple old man, who liked doing things for himself. He gave his valet little work, and never required any attendance at night. In the bedroom I took off Levy's gloves and put on a surgical pair, so as to leave no tell-tale finger-prints. As I wished to convey the impression that Levy had gone to bed in the usual way, I simply went to bed. The surest and simplest method of making a thing appear to have been done is to do it. A bed that has been rumpled about with one's hands, for instance, never looks like a bed that has been slept in. I dared not use Levy's brush, of course, as my hair is not of his colour, but I did everything else. I supposed that a thoughtful old man like Levy would put his boots handy for his valet, and I ought to have deduced that he would fold up his clothes. That was a mistake, but not an important one. Re-

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membering that well-thought-out little work of Mr. Bentley's, I had examined Levy's mouth for false teeth, but he had none. I did not forget, however, to wet his tooth-brush.

At one o'clock I got up and dressed in my own clothes by the light of my own pocket torch. I dared not turn on the bedroom lights, as there were light blinds to the windows. I put on my own boots and an old pair of goloshes outside the door. There was a thick Turkey carpet on the stairs and hall-floor, and I was not afraid of leaving marks. I hesitated whether to chance the banging of the front door, but decided it would be safer to take the latchkey. (It is now in the Thames. I dropped it over Battersea Bridge the next day.) I slipped quietly down, and listened for a few minutes with my ear to the letter-box. I heard a constable tramp past. As soon as his steps had died away in the distance I stepped out and pulled the door gingerly to. It closed almost soundlessly, and I walked away to pick up my cab. I had an overcoat of much the same pattern as Levy's, and had taken the precaution to pack an opera hat in my suitcase. I hoped the man would not notice that I had no umbrella this time. Fortunately the rain had diminished for the moment to a sort of drizzle, and if he noticed anything he made no observation. I told him to stop at 50 Overstrand Mansions, and I paid him off there, and stood under the porch till he had driven away. Then I hurried round to my own side door and let myself in. It was about a quarter to

two, and the harder part of my task still lay before me.

My first step was so to alter the appearance of my subject as to eliminate any immediate suggestion either of Levy or of the workhouse vagrant. A fairly superficial alteration was all I considered necessary, since there was not likely to be any hue-and-cry after the pauper. He was fairly accounted for, and his deputy was at hand to represent him. Nor, if Levy was after all traced to my house, would it be difficult to show that the body in evidence was, as a matter of fact, not his. A clean shave and a little hair-oiling and manicuring seemed sufficient to suggest a distinct personality for my silent accomplice. His hands had been well washed in hospital, and though calloused, were not grimy. I was not able to do the work as thoroughly as I should have liked, because time was getting on. I was not sure how long it would take me to dispose of him, and moreover, I feared the onset of *rigor mortis*, which would make my task more difficult. When I had him barbered to my satisfaction, I fetched a strong sheet and a couple of wide roller bandages, and fastened him up carefully, padding him with cotton wool wherever the bandages might chafe or leave a bruise.

Now came the really ticklish part of the business. I had already decided in my own mind that the only way of conveying him from the house was by the roof. To go through the garden at the back in this soft wet weather was to leave a ruinous trail behind us. To carry a dead man down a suburban street in

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the middle of the night seemed outside the range of practical politics. On the roof, on the other hand, the rain, which would have betrayed me on the ground, would stand my friend.

To reach the roof, it was necessary to carry my burden to the top of the house, past my servants' room, and hoist him out through the trap-door in the box-room roof. Had it merely been a question of going quietly up there myself, I should have had no fear of waking the servants, but to do so burdened by a heavy body was more difficult. It would be possible, provided that the man and his wife were soundly asleep, but if not, the lumbering tread on the narrow stair and the noise of opening the trap-door would be only too plainly audible. I tiptoed delicately up the stair and listened at their door. To my disgust I heard the man give a grunt and mutter something as he moved in his bed.

I looked at my watch. My preparations had taken nearly an hour, first and last, and I dared not be too late on the roof. I determined to take a bold step and, as it were, bluff out an alibi. I went without precaution against noise into the bathroom, turned on the hot and cold water taps to the full and pulled out the plug.

My household has often had occasion to complain of my habit of using the bath at irregular night hours. Not only does the rush of water into the cistern disturb any sleepers on the Prince of Wales Road side of the house, but my cistern is afflicted with peculiarly loud gurglings and thumpings, while fre-

quently the pipes emit a loud groaning sound. To my delight, on this particular occasion, the cistern was in excellent form, honking, whistling and booming like a railway terminus. I gave the noise five minutes' start, and when I calculated that the sleepers would have finished cursing me and put their heads under the clothes to shut out the din, I reduced the flow of water to a small stream and left the bathroom, taking good care to leave the light burning and lock the door after me. Then I picked up my pauper and carried him upstairs as lightly as possible.

The box-room is a small attic on the side of the landing opposite to the servants' bedroom and the cistern-room. It has a trap-door, reached by a short, wooden ladder. I set this up, hoisted up my pauper and climbed up after him. The water was still racing into the cistern, which was making a noise as though it were trying to digest an iron chain, and with the reduced flow in the bathroom the groaning of the pipes had risen almost to a hoot. I was not afraid of anybody hearing other noises. I pulled the ladder through on to the roof after me.

Between my house and the last house in Queen Caroline Mansions there is a space of only a few feet. Indeed, when the Mansions were put up, I believe there was some trouble about ancient lights, but I suppose the parties compromised somehow. Anyhow, my seven-foot ladder reached well across. I tied the body firmly to the ladder, and pushed it over till the far end was resting on the parapet of the opposite house. Then I took a short run across the cistern-

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room and the box-room roof, and landed easily on the other side, the parapet being happily both low and narrow.

The rest was simple. I carried my pauper along the flat roofs, intending to leave him, like the hunchback in the story, on someone's staircase or down a chimney. I had got about half-way along when I suddenly thought, "Why, this must be about little Thipps's place," and I remembered his silly face, and his silly chatter about vivisection. It occurred to me pleasantly how delightful it would be to deposit my parcel with him and see what he made of it. I lay down and peered over the parapet at the back. It was pitch-dark and pouring with rain again by this time, and I risked using my torch. That was the only incautious thing I did, and the odds against being seen from the houses opposite were long enough. One second's flash showed me what I had hardly dared to hope—an open window just below me.

I knew those flats well enough to be sure it was either the bathroom or the kitchen. I made a noose in a third bandage that I had brought with me, and made it fast under the arms of the corpse. I twisted it into a double rope, and secured the end to the iron stanchion of a chimney-stack. Then I dangled our friend over. I went down after him myself with the aid of a drain-pipe and was soon hauling him in by Thipps's bathroom window.

By that time I had got a little conceited with myself, and spared a few minutes to lay him out prettily and make him shipshape. A sudden inspiration sug-

gested that I should give him the pair of pince-nez which I had happened to pick up at Victoria. I came across them in my pocket while I was looking for a penknife to loosen a knot, and I saw what distinction they would lend his appearance, besides making it more misleading. I fixed them on him, effaced all traces of my presence as far as possible, and departed as I had come, going easily up between the drain-pipe and the rope.

I walked quietly back, re-crossed my crevasse and carried in my ladder and sheet. My discreet accomplice greeted me with a reassuring gurgie and thump. I didn't make a sound on the stairs. Seeing that I had now been having a bath for about three-quarters of an hour, I turned the water off, and enabled my deserving domestics to get a little sleep. I also felt it was time I had a little myself.

First, however, I had to go over to the hospital and make all safe there. I took off Levy's head, and started to open up the face. In twenty minutes his own wife could not have recognised him. I returned, leaving my wet goloshes and mackintosh by the garden door. My trousers I dried by the gas stove in my bedroom, and brushed away all traces of mud and brickdust. My pauper's beard I burned in the library.

I got a good two hours' sleep from five to seven, when my man called me as usual. I apologized for having kept the water running so long and so late, and added that I thought I would have the cistern seen to.

I was interested to note that I was rather extra

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hungry at breakfast, showing that my night's work had caused a certain wear-and-tear of tissue. I went over afterwards to continue my dissection. During the morning a peculiarly thick-headed police inspector came to inquire whether a body had escaped from the hospital. I had him brought to me where I was, and had the pleasure of showing him the work I was doing on Sir Reuben Levy's head. Afterwards I went round with him to Thipps's and was able to satisfy myself that my pauper looked very convincing.

As soon as the Stock Exchange opened I telephoned my various brokers, and by exercising a little care, was able to sell out the greater part of my Peruvian stock on a rising market. Towards the end of the day, however, buyers became rather unsettled as a result of Levy's death, and in the end I did not make more than a few hundreds by the transaction.

Trusting I have now made clear to you any point which you may have found obscure, and with congratulations on the good fortune and perspicacity which have enabled you to defeat me, I remain, with kind remembrances to your mother,

Yours very truly,
JULIAN FREKE

Post-Scriptum: My will is made, leaving my money to St. Luke's Hospital, and bequeathing my body to the same institution for dissection. I feel sure that my brain will be of interest to the scientific world. As I shall die by my own hand, I imagine that there

may be a little difficulty about this. Will you do me the favour, if you can, of seeing the persons concerned in the inquest, and obtaining that the brain is not damaged by an unskilful practitioner at the post-mortem, and that the body is disposed of according to my wish?

By the way, it may be of interest to you to know that I appreciated your motive in calling this afternoon. It conveyed a warning, and I am acting upon it in spite of the disastrous consequences to myself. I was pleased to realize that you had not underestimated my nerve and intelligence, and refused the injection. Had you submitted to it, you would, of course, never have reached home alive. No trace would have been left in your body of the injection, which consisted of a harmless preparation of strychnine, mixed with an almost unknown poison, for which there is at present no recognised test, a concentrated solution of sn—

At this point the manuscript broke off.

"Well, that's all clear enough," said Parker.

"Isn't it queer?" said Lord Peter. "All that coolness, all those brains—and then he couldn't resist writing a confession to show how clever he was, even to keep his head out of the noose."

"And a very good thing for us," said Inspector Sugg, "but Lord bless you, sir, these criminals are all alike."

"Freke's epitaph," said Parker, when the Inspector had departed. "What next, Peter?"

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"I shall now give a dinner party," said Lord Peter, "to Mr. John P. Milligan and his secretary and to Messrs. Crimplesham and Wicks. I feel they deserve it for not having murdered Levy."

"Well, don't forget the Thippses," said Mr. Parker.

"On no account," said Lord Peter, "would I deprive myself of the pleasure of Mrs. Thipps's company. Bunter!"

"My lord?"

"The Napoleon brandy."

THE UNPLEASANTNESS
AT THE BELLONA CLUB

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CHAPTER I

Old Mossy-face

"WHAT IN THE WORLD, WIMSEY, ARE YOU DOING in this Morgue?" demanded Captain Fentiman, flinging aside the "Evening Banner" with the air of a man released from an irksome duty.

"Oh, I wouldn't call it that," retorted Wimsey, amiably. "Funeral Parlor at the very least. Look at the marble. Look at the furnishings. Look at the palms and the chaste bronze nude in the corner."

"Yes, and look at the corpses. Place always reminds me of that old thing in 'Punch,' you know—'Waiter, take away Lord Whatsisname, he's been dead two days.' Look at Old Ormsby there, snoring like a hippopotamus. Look at my revered grandpa—dodders in here at ten every morning, collects the 'Morning Post' and the armchair by the fire, and becomes part of the furniture till the evening. Poor old devil. Suppose I'll be like that one of these days. I wish to God Jerry had put me out with the rest of 'em. What's the good of coming through for this sort of thing? What'll you have?"

"Dry martini," said Wimsey. "And you? Two

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dry martinis, Fred, please. Cheer up. All this remembrance-day business gets on your nerves, don't it? It's my belief most of us would be only too pleased to chuck these community hysterics if the beastly newspapers didn't run it for all it's worth. However, it don't do to say so. They'd hoof me out of the Club if I raised my voice beyond a whisper."

"They'd do that anyway, whatever you were saying," said Fentiman, gloomily. "What *are* you doing here?"

"Waitin' for Colonel Marchbanks," said Wimsey. "Bung-ho!"

"Dining with him?"

"Yes."

Fentiman nodded quietly. He knew that young Marchbanks had been killed at Hill 60, and that the Colonel was wont to give a small, informal dinner on Armistice night to his son's intimate friends.

"I don't mind old Marchbanks," he said, after a pause. "He's a dear old boy."

Wimsey assented.

"And how are things going with you?" he asked.

"Oh, rotten as usual. Tummy all wrong and no money. What's the damn good of it, Wimsey? A man goes and fights for his country, gets his inside gassed out, and loses his job, and all they give him is the privilege of marching past the Cenotaph once a year and paying four shillings in the pound income-tax. Sheila's queer too—overwork, poor girl.

It's pretty damnable for a man to have to live on his wife's earnings, isn't it? I can't help it, Wimsey. I go sick and have to chuck jobs up. Money—I never thought of money before the War, but I swear nowadays I'd commit any damned crime to get hold of a decent income."

Fentiman's voice had risen in nervous excitement. A shocked veteran, till then invisible in a neighbouring armchair, poked out a lean head like a tortoise and said "Sh!" viperishly.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," said Wimsey, lightly. "Crime's a skilled occupation, y' know. Even a comparative imbecile like myself can play the giddy sleuth on the amateur Moriarity. If you're thinkin' of puttin' on a false mustache and lammin' a millionaire on the head, don't do it. That disgustin' habit you have of smoking cigarettes down to the last millimeter would betray you anywhere. I'd only have to come on with a magnifyin' glass and a pair of callipers to say 'The criminal is my dear old friend George Fentiman. Arrest that man!' You might not think it, but I am ready to sacrifice my nearest and dearest in order to curry favour with the police and get a par. in the papers."

Fentiman laughed, and ground out the offending cigarette stub on the nearest ash-tray.

"I wonder anybody cares to know you," he said. The strain and bitterness had left his voice and he sounded merely amused.

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"They wouldn't," said Wimsey, "only they think I'm too well-off to have any brains. It's like hearing that the Earl of Somewhere is taking a leading part in a play. Everybody takes it for granted he must act rottenly. I'll tell you my secret. All my criminological investigations are done for me by a 'ghost' at £3 a week, while I get the headlines and frivel with well-known journalists at the Savoy."

"I find you refreshing, Wimsey," said Fentiman, languidly. "You're not in the least witty, but you have a kind of obvious facetiousness which reminds me of the less exacting class of music-hall."

"It's the self-defense of the first-class mind against the superior person," said Wimsey. "But, look here, I'm sorry to hear about Sheila. I don't want to be offensive, old man, but why don't you let me——"

"Damned good of you," said Fentiman, "but I don't care to. There's honestly not the faintest chance I could ever pay you, and I haven't quite got to the point yet——"

"Here's Colonel Marchbanks," broke in Wimsey, "we'll talk about it another time. Good evening, Colonel."

"Evening, Peter. Evening, Fentiman. Beautiful day it's been. No—no cocktails, thanks, I'll stick to whisky. So sorry to keep you waiting like this, but I was having a yarn with poor old Grainger

upstairs. He's in a baddish way, I'm afraid. Between you and me, Penberthy doesn't think he'll last out the winter. Very sound man, Penberthy—wonderful, really, that he's kept the old man going so long with his lungs in that frail state. Ah, well! it's what we must all come to. Dear me, there's your grandfather, Fentiman. He's another of Penberthy's miracles. He must be ninety, if he's a day. Will you excuse me for a moment? I must just go and speak to him."

Wimsey's eyes followed the alert, elderly figure as it crossed the spacious smoking-room, pausing now and again to exchange greetings with a fellow-member of the Bellona Club. Drawn close to the huge fireplace stood a great chair with ears after the Victorian pattern. A pair of spindle shanks with neatly-buttoned shoes propped on a footstool were all that was visible of General Fentiman.

"Queer, isn't it," muttered his grandson, "to think that for Old Mossy-face there the Crimea is still *the* War, and the Boer business found him too old to go out. He was given his commission at seventeen, you know—was wounded at Majuba—"

He broke off. Wimsey was not paying attention. He was still watching Colonel Marchbanks.

The Colonel came back to them, walking very quietly and precisely. Wimsey rose and went to meet him.

"I say, Peter," said the Colonel, his kind face

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gravely troubled, "just come over here a moment. I'm afraid something rather unpleasant has happened."

Fentiman looked round, and something in their manner made him get up and follow them over to the fire.

Wimsey bent down over General Fentiman and drew the "Morning Post" gently away from the gnarled old hands, which lay clasped over the thin chest. He touched the shoulder—put his hand under the white head huddled against the side of the chair. The Colonel watched him anxiously. Then, with a quick jerk, Wimsey lifted the quiet figure. It came up all of a piece, stiff as a wooden doll.

Fentiman laughed. Peal after hysterical peal shook his throat. All round the room, scandalized Bellonians creaked to their gouty feet, shocked by the unmannerly noise.

"Take him away!" said Fentiman, "take him away. He's been dead two days! So are you! So am I! We're all dead and we never noticed it!"

CHAPTER II

The Queen Is Out

IT IS DOUBTFUL WHICH OCCURRENCE WAS MORE disagreeable to the senior members of the Bellona Club—the grotesque death of General Fentiman in their midst or the indecent neurasthenia of his grandson. Only the younger men felt no sense of outrage; they knew too much. Dick Challoner—known to his intimates as Tin-Tummy Challoner, owing to the fact that he had been fitted with a spare part after the second battle of the Somme—took the gasping Fentiman away into the deserted library for a stiffener. The Club Secretary hurried in, in his dress-shirt and trousers, the half-dried lather still clinging to his jaws. After one glance he sent an agitated waiter to see if Dr. Penberthy was still in the Club. Colonel Marchbanks laid a large silk handkerchief reverently over the rigid face in the arm-chair and remained quietly standing. A little circle formed about the edge of the hearth-rug, not quiet certain what to do. From time to time it was swelled by fresh arrivals, whom the news had greeted in the hall as they wandered in. A little group appeared from the bar. "What? old

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Fentiman?" they said. "Good God, you don't say so. Poor old blighter. Heart gone at last, I suppose"; and they extinguished cigars and cigarettes, and stood by, not liking to go away again.

Dr. Penberthy was just changing for dinner. He came down hurriedly, caught just as he was going out to an Armistice dinner, his silk hat tilted to the back of his head, his coat and muffler pushed loosely open. He was a thin, dark man with the abrupt manner which distinguishes the Army Surgeon from the West-end practitioner. The group by the fire made way for him, except Wimsey, who hung rather foolishly upon the big elbow-chair, gazing in a helpless way at the body.

Penberthy ran practised hands quickly over neck, wrists and knee-joints.

"Dead several hours," he pronounced, sharply. "Rigor well-established—beginning to pass off." He moved the dead man's left leg in illustration; it swung loose at the knee. "I've been expecting this. Heart very weak. Might happen any moment. Any one spoken to him to-day?"

He glanced round interrogatively.

"I saw him here after lunch," volunteered somebody. "I didn't speak."

"I thought he was asleep," said another.

Nobody remembered speaking to him. They were so used to old General Fentiman, slumbering by the fire.

"Ah, well," said the doctor. "What's the time? Seven?" He seemed to make a rapid calculation. "Say five hours for rigor to set in—must have taken place very rapidly—he probably came in at his usual time, sat down and died straight away."

"He always walked from Dover Street," put in an elderly man, "I told him it was too great an exertion at his age. You've heard me say so, Ormsby."

"Yes, yes, quite," said the purple-faced Ormsby. "Dear me, just so."

"Well, there's nothing to be done," said the doctor. "Died in his sleep. Is there an empty bedroom we can take him to, Culyer?"

"Yes, certainly," said the Secretary. "James, fetch the key of number sixteen from my office and tell them to put the bed in order. I suppose, eh, doctor?—when the rigor passes off we shall be able to—eh?"

"Oh, yes, you'll be able to do everything that's required. I'll send the proper people in to lay him out for you. Somebody had better let his people know—only they'd better not show up till we can get him more presentable."

"Captain Fentiman knows already," said Colonel Marchbanks. "And Major Fentiman is staying in the Club—he'll probably be in before long. Then there's a sister, I think."

"Yes, old Lady Dormer," said Penberthy, "she lives round in Portman Square. They haven't been

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on speaking terms for years. Still, she'll have to know."

"I'll ring them up," said the Colonel. "We can't leave it to Captain Fentiman, he's in no fit state to be worried, poor fellow. You'll have to have a look at him, doctor, when you've finished here. An attack of the old trouble—nerves, you know."

"All right. Ah! is the room ready, Culyer? Then we'll move him. Will somebody take his shoulders—no, not you, Culyer" (for the Secretary had only one sound arm), "Lord Peter, yes, thank you—lift carefully."

Wimsey put his long, strong hands under the stiff arms; the doctor gathered up the legs; they moved away. They looked like a dreadful little Guy Fawkes procession, with that humped and un-reverend mannikin bobbing and swaying between them.

The door closed after them, and a tension seemed removed. The circle broke up into groups. Somebody lit a cigarette. The planet's tyrant, dotard Death, had held his gray mirror before them for a moment and shown them the image of things to come. But now it was taken away again. The unpleasantness had passed. Fortunate, indeed, that Penberthy was the old man's own doctor. He knew all about it. He could give a certificate. No inquest. Nothing undesirable. The members of the Bellona Club could go to dinner.

Colonel Marchbanks turned to go through the far door towards the library. In a narrow ante-room between the two rooms there was a convenient telephone-cabinet for the use of those members who did not wish to emerge into the semi-publicity of the entrance-hall.

"Hi, colonel! not that one. That instrument's out of order," said a man called Wetheridge, who saw him go. "Disgraceful, I call it. I wanted to use the 'phone this morning, and—oh! hullo! the notice has gone. I suppose it's all right again. They ought to let one know."

Colonel Marchbanks paid little attention to Wetheridge. He was the club grumbler, distinguished even in that fellowship of the dyspeptic and peremptory—always threatening to complain to the Committee, harassing the Secretary and constituting a perennial thorn in the sides of his fellow-members. He retired, murmuring, to his chair and the evening paper, and the Colonel stepped into the telephone-cabinet to call up Lady Dormer's house in Portman Square.

Presently he came out through the library into the entrance-hall, and met Penberthy and Wimsey just descending the staircase.

"Have you broken the news to Lady Dormer?" asked Wimsey.

"Lady Dormer is dead," said the Colonel. "Her maid tells me she passed quietly away at half-past ten this morning."

CHAPTER III

Hearts Count More Than Diamonds

ABOUT TEN DAYS AFTER THAT NOTABLE ARMISTICE Day, Lord Peter Wimsey was sitting in his library, reading a rare fourteenth century manuscript of Justinian. It gave him particular pleasure, being embellished with a large number of drawings in sepia, extremely delicate in workmanship, and not always equally so in subject. Beside him on a convenient table stood a long-necked decanter of priceless old port. From time to time he stimulated his interest with a few sips, pursing his lips thoughtfully, and slowly savouring the balmy after-taste.

A ring at the front-door of the flat caused him to exclaim "Oh, hell!" and cock an attentive ear for the intruder's voice. Apparently the result was satisfactory, for he closed the Justinian and had assumed a welcoming smile when the door opened.

"Mr. Murbles, my lord."

The little elderly gentleman who entered was so perfectly the family solicitor as really to have no distinguishing personality at all, beyond a great kindness of heart and a weakness for soda-mint lozenges.

"I am not disturbing you, I trust, Lord Peter."

"Good lord, no, sir. Always delighted to see you. Bunter, a glass for Mr. Murbles. Very glad you've turned up, sir. The Cockburn '80 always tastes a lot better in company—discernin' company, that is. Once knew a fellow who polluted it with a Trichinopoly. He was not asked again. Eight months later, he committed suicide. I don't say it was on that account. But he was earmarked for a bad end, what?"

"You horrify me," said Mr. Murbles, gravely. "I have seen many men sent to the gallows for crimes with which I could feel much more sympathy. Thank-you, Bunter, thank-you. You are quite well, I trust?"

"I am in excellent health, I am obliged to you, sir."

"That's good. Been doing any photography lately?"

"A certain amount, sir. But merely of a pictorial description, if I may venture to call it so. Criminological material, sir, has been distressingly deficient of late."

"Perhaps Mr. Murbles has brought us something," suggested Wimsey.

"No," said Mr. Murbles, holding the Cockburn '80 beneath his nostrils and gently agitating the glass to release the ethers, "no, I can't say I have, precisely. I will not disguise that I have come in

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the hope of deriving benefit from your trained habits of observation and deduction, but I fear—that is, I trust—in fact, I am confident—that nothing of an undesirable nature is involved. The fact is,” he went on, as the door closed upon the retreating Bunter, “a curious question has arisen with regard to the sad death of General Fentiman at the Bellona Club, to which, I understand, you were a witness.”

“If you understand that, Murbles,” said his lordship, cryptically, “you understand a damn sight more than I do. I did not witness the death—I witnessed the discovery of the death—which is a very different thing, by a long chalk.”

“By how long a chalk?” asked Mr. Murbles, eagerly. “That is just what I am trying to find out.”

“That’s very inquisitive of you,” said Wimsey. “I think perhaps it would be better . . .” he lifted his glass and tilted it thoughtfully, watching the wine coil down in thin flower-petallings from rim to stem . . . “if you were to tell me exactly what you want to know . . . and why. After all . . . I’m a member of the Club . . . family associations chiefly, I suppose . . . but there it is.”

Mr. Murbles looked up sharply, but Wimsey’s attention seemed focussed upon the port.

“Quite so,” said the solicitor. “Very well. The facts of the matter are these. General Fentiman

had, as you know, a sister Felicity, twelve years younger than himself. She was very beautiful and very wilful as a girl, and ought to have made a very fine match, but for the fact that the Fentimans, though extremely well-descended, were anything but well-off. As usual at that period, all the money there was went to educating the boy, buying him a commission in a crack regiment and supporting him there in the style which was considered indispensable for a Fentiman. Consequently there was nothing left to furnish a marriage-portion for Felicity, and that was rather disastrous for a young woman sixty years ago.

"Well, Felicity got tired of being dragged through the social round in her darned muslins and gloves that had been to the cleaners—and she had the spirit to resent her mother's perpetual strategies in the match-making line. There was a dreadful, decrepit old viscount, eaten up with diseases and dissipations, who would have been delighted to totter to the altar with a handsome young creature of eighteen, and I am sorry to say that the girl's father and mother did everything they could to force her into accepting this disgraceful proposal. In fact, the engagement was announced and the wedding-day fixed, when, to the extreme horror of her family, Felicity calmly informed them one morning that she had gone out before breakfast and actually got married, in the most indecent

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secrecy and haste, to a middle-aged man called Dormer, very honest and abundantly wealthy, and—horrid to relate—a prosperous manufacturer. Buttons, in fact—made of papier mâché or something, with a patent indestructible shank—were the revolting antecedents to which this headstrong young Victorian had allied herself.

“Naturally there was a terrible scandal, and the parents did their best—seeing that Felicity was a minor—to get the marriage annulled. However, Felicity checkmated their plans pretty effectually by escaping from her bedroom—I fear, indeed, that she actually climbed down a tree in the back-garden, crinoline and all—and running away with her husband. After which, seeing that the worst had happened—indeed, Dormer, a man of prompt action, lost no time in putting his bride in the family way—the old people put the best face they could on it in the grand Victorian manner. That is, they gave their consent to the marriage, forwarded their daughter’s belongings to her new home in Manchester, and forbade her to darken their doors again.”

“Highly proper,” murmured Wimsey. “I’m determined never to be a parent. Modern manners and the break-up of the fine old traditions have simply ruined the business. I shall devote my life and fortune to the endowment of research on the best method of producin’ human beings decorously

and unobtrusively from eggs. All parental responsibility to devolve upon the incubator."

"I hope not," said Mr. Murbles. "My own profession is largely supported by domestic entanglements. To proceed. Young Arthur Fentiman seems to have shared the family views. He was disgusted at having a brother-in-law in buttons, and the jests of his mess-mates did nothing to sweeten his feelings toward his sister. He became impenetrably military and professional, crusted over before his time, and refused to acknowledge the existence of anybody called Dormer. Mind you, the old boy was a fine soldier, and absolutely wrapped up in his Army associations. In due course he married—not well, for he had not the means to entitle him to a noble wife, and he would not demean himself by marrying money, like the unspeakable Felicity. He married a suitable gentlewoman with a few thousand pounds. She died (largely, I believe, owing to the military regularity with which her husband ordained that she should perform her maternal functions), leaving a numerous but feeble family of children. Of these, the only one to attain maturity was the father of the two Fentimans you know—Major Robert and Captain George Fentiman."

"I don't know Robert very well," interjected Wimsey. "I've met him. Frightfully hearty and all that—regular army type."

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"Yes, he's of the old Fentiman stock. Poor George inherited a weakly strain from his grandmother, I'm afraid."

"Well, nervous, anyhow," said Wimsey, who knew better than the old solicitor the kind of mental and physical strain George Fentiman had undergone. The War pressed hardly upon imaginative men in responsible positions. "And then he was gassed and all that, you know," he added, apologetically.

"Just so," said Mr. Murbles. "Robert, you know, is unmarried and still in the Army. He's not particularly well-off, naturally, for none of the Fentimans ever had a bean, as I believe one says nowadays; but he does very well. George——"

"Poor old George! All right, sir, you needn't tell me about him. Usual story. Decentish job—imprudent marriage—chucks everything to join up in 1914—invalided out—job gone—health gone—no money—heroic wife keeping the home-fires burning—general fed-upness. Don't let's harrow our feelings. Take it as read."

"Yes, I needn't go into that. Their father is dead, of course, and up till ten days ago there were just two surviving Fentimans of the earlier generation. The old General lived on the small fixed income which came to him through his wife and his retired pension. He had a solitary little flat in Dover Street and an elderly man-servant, and he prac-

tically lived at the Bellona Club. And there was his sister, Felicity."

"How did she come to be Lady Dormer?"

"Why, that's where we come to the interesting part of the story. Henry Dormer——"

"The button-maker?"

"The button-maker. He became an exceedingly rich man indeed—so rich, in fact, that he was able to offer financial assistance to certain exalted persons who need not be mentioned and so, in time, and in consideration of valuable services to the nation not very clearly specified in the Honours List, he became Sir Henry Dormer, Bart. His only child—a girl—had died, and there was no prospect of any further family, so there was, of course, no reason why he should not be made a baronet for his trouble."

"Acid man you are," said Wimsey. "No reverence, no simple faith or anything of that kind. Do lawyers ever go to heaven?"

"I have no information on that point," said Mr. Murbles, dryly. "Lady Dormer——"

"Did the marriage turn out well otherwise?" inquired Wimsey.

"I believe it was perfectly happy," replied the lawyer, "an unfortunate circumstance in one way, since it entirely precluded the possibility of any reconciliation with her relatives. Lady Dormer, who was a fine, generous-hearted woman, frequently

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made overtures of peace, but the General held sternly aloof. So did his son—partly out of respect for the old boy's wishes, but chiefly, I fancy, because he belonged to an Indian regiment and spent most of his time abroad. Robert Fentiman, however, showed the old lady a certain amount of attention, paying occasional visits and so forth, and so did George at one time. Of course they never let the General know a word about it, or he would have had a fit. After the War, George rather dropped his great-aunt—I don't know why."

"I can guess," said Wimsey. "No job—no money, y' know. Didn't want to look pointed. That sort of thing, what?"

"Possibly. Or there may have been some kind of quarrel. I don't know. Anyway, those are the facts. I hope I am not boring you, by the way?"

"I am bearing up," said Wimsey, "waiting for the point where the Money comes in. There's a steely legal glitter in your eye, sir, which suggests that the thrill is not far off."

"Quite correct," said Mr. Murbles. "I now come—thank-you, well, yes—I will take just one more glass. I thank Providence I am not of a gouty constitution. Yes. Ah!—We now come to the melancholy event of November 11th last, and I must ask you to follow me with the closest attention."

"By all means," said Wimsey, politely.

"Lady Dormer," pursued Mr. Murbles, leaning

earnestly forward, and punctuating every sentence with sharp little jabs of his gold-mounted eyeglasses, held in his right finger and thumb, "was an old woman, and had been ailing for a very long time. However, she was still the same headstrong and vivacious personality that she had been as a girl, and on the fifth of November she was suddenly seized with a fancy to go out at night and see a display of fireworks at the Crystal Palace or some such place—it may have been Hampstead Heath or the White City—I forget, and it is of no consequence. The important thing is, that it was a raw, cold evening. She insisted on undertaking her little expedition nevertheless, enjoyed the entertainment as heartily as the youngest child, imprudently exposed herself to the night air and caught a severe cold which, in two days' time, turned to pneumonia. On November 10th she was sinking fast, and scarcely expected to live out the night. Accordingly, the young lady who lived with her as her ward—a distant relative, Miss Ann Dorland—sent a message to General Fentiman that if he wished to see his sister alive, he should come immediately. For the sake of our common human nature, I am happy to say that this news broke down the barrier of pride and obstinacy that had kept the old gentleman away so long. He came, found Lady Dormer just conscious, though very feeble, stayed with her about half an hour and departed, still

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stiff as a ramrod, but visibly softened. This was about four o'clock in the afternoon. Shortly afterwards, Lady Dormer became unconscious, and, indeed, never moved or spoke again, passing peacefully away in her sleep at half-past ten the following morning.

"Presumably the shock and nervous strain of the interview with his long-estranged sister had been too much for the old General's feeble system, for, as you know, he died at the Bellona Club at some time—not yet clearly ascertained—on the same day, the eleventh of November.

"Now then, at last—and you have been very patient with my tedious way of explaining all this—we come to the point at which we want your help."

Mr. Murbles refreshed himself with a sip of port, and, looking a little anxiously at Wimsey, who had closed his eyes and appeared to be nearly asleep, he resumed.

"I have not mentioned, I think, how I come to be involved in this matter myself. My father was the Fentimans' family solicitor, a position to which I naturally succeeded when I took over the business at his death. General Fentiman, though he had little enough to leave, was not the sort of disorderly person who dies without making a proper testamentary disposition. His retired pension, of course, died with him, but his small private estate was

properly disposed by will. There was a small legacy—fifty pounds—to his man-servant (a very attached and superior fellow); then one or two trifling bequests to old military friends and the servants at the Bellona Club (rings, medals, weapons and small sums of a few pounds each). Then came the bulk of his estate, about £2,000, invested in sound securities, and bringing in an income of slightly over £100 per annum. These securities, specifically named and enumerated, were left to Captain George Fentiman, the younger grandson, in a very proper clause, which stated that the testator intended no slight in thus passing over the elder one, Major Robert, but that, as George stood in the greater need of monetary help, being disabled, married, and so forth, whereas his brother had his profession and was without ties, George's greater necessity gave him the better claim to such money as there was. Robert was finally named as executor and residuary legate, thus succeeding to all such personal effects and monies as were not specifically devised elsewhere. Is that clear?"

"Clear as a bell. Was Robert satisfied with that arrangement?"

"Oh dear, yes; perfectly. He knew all about the will beforehand and had agreed that it was quite fair and right."

"Nevertheless," said Wimsey, "it appears to be

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such a small matter, on the face of it, that you must be concealing something perfectly devastating up your sleeve. Out with it, man, out with it! Whatever the shock may be, I am braced to bear it."

"The shock," said Mr. Murbles, "was inflicted on me, personally, last Friday by Lady Dormer's man of business—Mr. Pritchard of Lincoln's Inn. He wrote to me, asking if I could inform him of the exact hour and minute of General Fentiman's decease. I replied, of course, that, owing to the peculiar circumstances under which the event took place, I was unable to answer his question as precisely as I could have wished, but that I understood Dr. Penberthy to have given it as his opinion that the General had died some time in the forenoon of November 11th. Mr. Pritchard then asked if he might wait upon me without delay, as the matter he had to discuss was of the most urgent importance. Accordingly I appointed a time for the interview on Monday afternoon, and when Mr. Pritchard arrived he informed me of the following particulars.

"A good many years before her death, Lady Dormer—who, as I said before, was an eminently generous-minded woman—made a will. Her husband and her daughter were then dead. Henry Dormer had few relations, and all of them were fairly wealthy people. By his own will he had

sufficiently provided for these persons, and had left the remainder of his property, amounting to something like seven hundred thousand pounds, to his wife, with the express stipulation that she was to consider it as her own, to do what she liked with, without any restriction whatsoever. Accordingly, Lady Dormer's will divided this very handsome fortune—apart from certain charitable and personal bequests with which I need not trouble you—between the people who, for one reason and another, had the greatest claims on her affection. Twelve thousand pounds were to go to Miss Ann Dorland. The whole of the remainder was to pass to her brother, General Fentiman, if he was still living at her death. If, on the other hand, he should pre-decease her, the conditions were reversed. In that case, the bulk of the money came to Miss Dorland, and fifteen thousand pounds were to be equally divided between Major Robert Fentiman and his brother George.”

Wimsey whistled softly.

“I quite agree with you,” said Mr. Murbles. “It is a most awkward situation. Lady Dormer died at precisely 10:37 A. M. on November 11th. General Fentiman died that same morning at some time, presumably after 10 o'clock, which was his usual hour for arriving at the Club, and certainly before 7 P. M. when his death was discovered. If he died immediately on his arrival, or at any time up to

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10:36, then Miss Dorland is an important heiress, and my clients the Fentimans get only seven thousand pounds or so apiece. If, on the other hand, his death occurred even a few seconds after 10:37, Miss Dorland receives only twelve thousand pounds, George Fentiman is left with the small pittance bequeathed to him under his father's will—while Robert Fentiman, the residuary legatee, inherits a very considerable fortune of well over half a million."

"And what," said Wimsey, "do you want me to do about it?"

"Why," replied the lawyer, with a slight cough, "it occurred to me that you, with your—if I may say so—remarkable powers of deduction and analysis might be able to solve the extremely difficult and delicate problem of the precise moment of General Fentiman's decease. You were in the Club when the death was discovered, you saw the body, you know the places and the persons involved, and you are, by your standing and personal character, exceptionally well fitted to carry out the necessary investigations without creating any—ahem!—public agitation or—er—scandal, or, in fact, notoriety, which would, I need hardly say, be extremely painful to all concerned."

"It's awkward," said Wimsey, "uncommonly awkward."

"It is indeed," said the lawyer with some warmth,

"for as we are now situated, it is impossible to execute either will or—or in short do anything at all. It is most unfortunate that the circumstances were not fully understood at the time, when the—um—the body of General Fentiman was available for inspection. Naturally, Mr. Pritchard was quite unaware of the anomalous situation, and as I knew nothing about Lady Dormer's will, I had no idea that anything beyond Dr. Penberthy's certificate was, or ever could become, necessary."

"Couldn't you get the parties to come to some agreement?" suggested Wimsey.

"If we are unable to reach any satisfactory conclusion about the time of the death, that will probably be the only way out of the difficulty. But at the moment there are certain obstacles——"

"Somebody's being greedy, eh?—You'd rather not say more definitely, I suppose? No? H'm, well! From a purely detached point of view it's a very pleasin' and pretty little problem, you know."

"You will undertake to solve it for us then, Lord Peter?"

Wimsey's fingers tapped out an intricate fugal passage on the arm of his chair.

"If I were you, Murbles, I'd try again to get a settlement."

"Do you mean," asked Mr. Murbles, "that you think my clients have a losing case?"

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"No—I can't say that. By the way, Murbles, who is your client—Robert or George?"

"Well, the Fentiman family in general. I know, naturally, that Robert's gain is George's loss. But none of the parties wishes anything but that the actual facts of the case should be determined."

"I see. You'll put up with anything I happen to dig out?"

"Of course."

"However favourable or unfavourable it may be?"

"I should not lend myself to any other course," said Mr. Murbles, rather stiffly.

"I know that, sir. But—well!—I only mean that—Look here, sir! when you were a boy, did you ever go about pokin' sticks and things into peaceful, mysterious lookin' ponds, just to see what was at the bottom?"

"Frequently," replied Mr. Murbles. "I was extremely fond of natural history and had a quite remarkable collection (if I may say so at this distance of time) of pond fauna."

"Did you ever happen to stir up a deuce of a stink in the course of your researches?"

"My dear Lord Peter—you are making me positively uneasy."

"Oh, I don't know that you need be. I am only giving you a general warning, you know. Of

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course, if you wish it, I'll investigate this business like a shot."

"It's very good of you," said Mr. Murbles.

"Not at all. *I* shall enjoy it all right. If anything odd comes of it, that's your funeral. You never know, you know."

"If you decide that no satisfactory conclusion can be arrived at," said Mr. Murbles, "we can always fall back on the settlement. I am sure all parties wish to avoid litigation."

"In case the estate vanishes in costs? Very wise. I hope it may be feasible. Have you made any preliminary inquiries?"

"None to speak of. I would rather you undertook the whole investigation from the beginning."

"Very well. I'll start to-morrow and let you know how it gets on."

The lawyer thanked him and took his departure. Wimsey sat pondering for a short time—then rang the bell for his man-servant.

"A new notebook, please, Bunter. Head it 'Fentiman' and be ready to come round with me to the Bellona Club to-morrow, complete with camera and the rest of the outfit."

"Very good, my lord. I take it your lordship has a new inquiry in hand?"

"Yes, Bunter—quite new."

"May I venture to ask if it is a promising case, my lord?"

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"It has its points. So has a porcupine. No matter. Begone, dull care! Be at great pains, Bunter, to cultivate a detached outlook on life. Take example by the bloodhound, who will follow up with equal and impartial zest the trail of a parricide or of a bottle of aniseed."

"I will bear it in mind, my lord."

Wimsey moved slowly across to the little black baby grand that stood in the corner of the library.

"Not Bach this evening," he murmured to himself. "Bach for to-morrow when the gray matter begins to revolve." A melody of Parry's formed itself crooningly under his fingers. 'For man worketh in a vain shadow . . . he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them.' He laughed suddenly, and plunged into an odd, noisy, and painfully inharmonious study by a modern composer in the key of seven sharps.

CHAPTER IV

Lord Peter Leads A Club

"YOU ARE QUITE SURE THIS SUIT IS ALL RIGHT, Bunter?" said Lord Peter, anxiously.

It was an easy lounge suit, tweedy in texture, and a trifle more pronounced in colour and pattern than Wimsey usually permitted himself. While not unsuitable for town wear, it yet diffused a faint suggestion of hills and the sea.

"I want to look approachable," he went on, "but on no account loud. I can't help wondering whether that stripe of invisible green wouldn't have looked better if it had been a remote purple."

This suggestion seemed to disconcert Bunter. There was a pause while he visualized a remote purple stripe. At length, however, the palpitating balance of his mind seemed to settle definitely down.

"No, my lord," he said firmly, "I do *not* think purple would be an improvement. Interesting—yes; but, if I may so express myself, decidedly less affable."

"Thank goodness," said his lordship, "I'm sure you're right. You always are. And it would have

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been a bore to get it changed now. You are sure you've removed all the newness, eh? Hate new clothes."

"Positive, my lord. I assure your lordship that the garments have every appearance of being several months old."

"Oh, all right. Well, give me the malacca with the foot-rule marked on it—and where's my lens?"

"Here, my lord." Bunter produced an innocent-looking monocle, which was, in reality, a powerful magnifier. "And the finger-print powder is in your lordship's right-hand coat-pocket."

"Thanks. Well, I think that's all. I'll go on now, and I want you to follow on with the doings in about an hour's time."

The Bellona Club is situated in Piccadilly, not many hundred yards west of Wimsey's own flat, which overlooks the Green Park. The commissioner greeted him with a pleased smile.

"Mornin', Rogers, how are you?"

"Very well, my lord, I thank you."

"D'you know if Major Fentiman is in the Club, by the way?"

"No, my lord. Major Fentiman is not residing with us at present. I believe he is occupying the late General Fentiman's flat, my lord."

"Ah, yes—very sad business, that."

"Very melancholy, my lord. Not a pleasant thing to happen in the Club. Very shocking, my lord."

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"Yes—still, he was a very old man. I suppose it had to be some day. Queer to think of 'em all sittin' round him there and never noticin', eh, what?"

"Yes, my lord. It gave Mrs. Rogers quite a turn when I told her about it."

"Seems almost unbelievable, don't it? Sittin' round all those hours—must have been several hours, I gather, from what the doctor says. I suppose the old boy came in at his usual time, eh?"

"Ah! regular as clock-work, the General was. Always on the stroke of ten. 'Good-morning, Rogers', he'd say, a bit stiff-like, but very friendly. And then, 'Fine morning,' he'd say, as like as not. And sometimes ask after Mrs. Rogers and the family. A fine old gentleman, my lord. We shall all miss him."

"Did you notice whether he seemed specially feeble or tired that morning at all?" inquired Wimsey, casually, tapping a cigarette on the back of his hand.

"Why, no, my lord. I beg your pardon, I fancied you knew. I wasn't on duty that day, my lord. I was kindly given permission to attend the ceremony at the Cenotaph. Very grand sight, it was, too, my lord. Mrs. Rogers was greatly moved."

"Oh, of course, Rogers—I was forgetting. Naturally, you would be there. So you didn't see the General to say good-bye, as it were. Still, it

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wouldn't have done to miss the Cenotaph. Matthews took your duty over, I suppose."

"No, my lord. Matthews is laid up with 'flu, I am sorry to say. It was Weston was at the door all morning, my lord."

"Weston? Who's he?"

"He's new, my lord. Took the place of Briggs. You recollect Briggs—his uncle died and left him a fish-shop."

"Of course he did; just so. When does Weston come on parade? I must make his acquaintance."

"He'll be here at one o'clock, when I go to my lunch, my lord."

"Oh, right! I'll probably be about then. Hallo, Penberthy! You're just the man I want to see. Had your morning's inspiration? Or come in to look for it?"

"Just tracking it to its lair. Have it with me."

"Right you are, old chap—half a mo' while I deposit my outer husk. I'll follow you."

He glanced irresolutely at the hall-porter's desk, but seeing the man already engaged with two or three inquiries, plunged abruptly into the cloak-room, where the attendant, a bright cockney with a Sam Weller face and an artificial leg, was ready enough to talk about General Fentiman.

"Well, now, my lord, that's funny you should ask me that," he said, when Wimsey had dexterously worked in an inquiry as to the time of the

General's arrival at the Bellona. "Dr. Penberthy was askin' the same question. It's a fair puzzle, that is. I could count on the fingers of one 'and the mornings I've missed seein' the General come in. Wonderful regular, the General was, and him being such a very old gentleman, I'd make a point of being 'andy, to 'elp him off with his overcoat and such. But there! He must a' come in a bit late, that morning, for I never see him, and I thought at lunch-time, 'The General must be ill,' I thinks. And I goes round, and there I see his coat and 'at 'ung up on his usual peg. So I must 'a missed him. There was a lot of gentlemen in and out that mornin', my lord, bein' Armistice Day. A number of members come up from the country and wanting their 'ats and boots attended to, my lord, so that's how I come not to notice, I suppose."

"Possibly. Well, he was in before lunch, at any rate."

"Oh, yes, my lord. 'Alf-past twelve I goes off, and his hat and coat were on the peg then, because I see 'em."

"That gives us a terminus ad quem at any rate," said Wimsey, half to himself.

"I beg your lordship's pardon?"

"I was saying, that shows he came in before half-past twelve—and later than ten o'clock, you think."

"Yes, my lord. I couldn't say to a fraction, but

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I'm sure if 'e'd arrived before a quarter-past ten I should have seen 'im. But after that, I recollect I was very busy, and he must 'a slipped in without me noticing him."

"Ah, yes—poor old boy! Still, no doubt he'd have liked to pass out quietly like that. Not a bad way to go home, Williamson."

"Very good way, my lord. We've seen worse than that. And what's it all come to, after all? They're all sayin' as it's an unpleasant thing for the Club, but *I* say, where's the odds? There ain't many 'ouses what somebody ain't died in, some time or another. We don't think any the worse of the 'ouses, so why think the worse of the Club?"

"You're a philosopher, Williamson." Wimsey climbed the short flight of marble steps and turned into the bar. "It's narrowin' down," he muttered to himself. "Between ten-fifteen and twelve-thirty. Looks as if it was goin' to be a close run for the Dormer stakes. But—dash it all! Let's hear what Penberthy has to say."

The doctor was already standing at the bar with a whisky-and-soda before him. Wimsey demanded a Worthington and dived into his subject without more ado.

"Look here," he said, "I just wanted a word with you about old Fentiman. Frightfully confidential, and all that. But it seems the exact time of the poor old blighter's departure has become an im-

portant item. Question of succession. Get me? They don't want a row made. Asked me, as friend of the family and all that, don't y' know, to barge round and ask questions. Obviously, you're the first man to come to. What's your opinion? Medical opinion, apart from anything else?"

Penberthy raised his eyebrows.

"Oh? there's a question, is there? Thought there might be. That lawyer-fellow, what's-his-name, was here the other day, trying to pin me down. Seemed to think one can say to a minute when a man died by looking at his back teeth. I told him it wasn't possible. Once give these birds an opinion, and the next thing is, you find yourself in a witness-box, swearing to it."

"I know. But one gets a general idea."

"Oh, yes. Only you have to check up your ideas by other things—facts, and so on. You can't just theorize."

"Very dangerous things, theories. F'r instance—take this case—I've seen one or two stiff 'uns in my short life, and, if I'd started theorizin' about this business, just from the look of the body, d'you know what I'd have said?"

"God knows what a layman would say about a medical question," retorted the doctor, with a sour little grin.

"Hear, hear!—Well, I should have said he'd been dead a long time."

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"That's pretty vague."

"You said yourself that rigour was well advanced. Give it, say, six hours to set in and—when did it pass off?"

"It was passing off then—I remarked upon it at the time."

"So you did. I thought rigour usually lasted twenty-four hours or so."

"It does, sometimes. Sometimes it goes off quickly. Quick come, quick go, as a rule. Still, I agree with you, that in the absence of other evidence, I should have put the death rather earlier than ten o'clock."

"You admit that?"

"I do. But we know he came in not earlier than a quarter past ten."

"You've seen Williamson, then?"

"Oh, yes. I thought it better to check up on the thing as far as possible. So I can only suppose that, what with the death being sudden, and what with the warmth of the room—he was very close to the fire, you know—the whole thing came on and worked itself off very quickly."

"H'm! Of course, you knew the old boy's constitution very well."

"Oh, rather. He was very frail. Heart gets a bit worn-out when you're over the four-score and ten, you know. I should never have been surprised at

his dropping down anywhere. And then, he'd had a bit of a shock, you see."

"What was that?"

"Seeing his sister the afternoon before. They told you about that, I imagine, since you seem to know all about the business. He came along to Harley Street afterwards and saw me. I told him to go to bed and keep quiet. Arteries very strained, and pulse erratic. He was excited—naturally. He ought to have taken a complete rest. As I see it, he must have insisted on getting up, in spite of feeling groggy, walked here—he *would* do it—and collapsed straight away."

"That's all right, Penberthy, but when—just when—did it happen?"

"Lord knows. I don't. Have another?"

"No, thanks; not for the moment. I say, I suppose you are perfectly satisfied about it all?"

"Satisfied?" The doctor stared at him. "Yes, of course. If you mean, satisfied as to what he died of—of course I'm satisfied. I shouldn't have given a certificate if I hadn't been satisfied."

"Nothing about the body struck you as queer?"

"What sort of thing?"

"You know what I mean as well as I do," said Wimsey, suddenly turning and looking the other straight in the face. The change in him was almost startling—it was as if a steel blade had whipped

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suddenly out of its velvet scabbard. Penberthy met his eye, and nodded slowly.

"Yes, I do know what you mean. But not here. We'd better go up to the Library. There won't be anybody there."

CHAPTER V

—And Finds The Club Suit Blocked

THERE NEVER WAS ANYBODY IN THE LIBRARY AT the Bellona. It was a large, quiet, pleasant room, with the bookshelves arranged in bays; each of which contained a writing-table and three or four chairs. Occasionally some one would wander in to consult the Times Atlas, or a work on Strategy and Tactics, or to hunt up an ancient Army list, but for the most part it was deserted. Sitting in the farthest bay, immured by books and silence, confidential conversation could be carried on with all the privacy of the confessional.

"Well, now," said Wimsey, "what about it?"

"About—?" prompted the doctor, with professional caution.

"About that leg?"

"I wonder if anybody else noticed that?" said Penberthy.

"I doubt it. I did, of course. But then, I make that kind of thing my hobby. Not a popular one, perhaps—an ill-favoured thing, but mine own. In fact, I've got rather a turn for corpses. But not knowin' quite what it meant, and seein' you didn't

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seem to want to call attention to it, I didn't put myself forward."

"No—I wanted to think it over. You see, it suggested, at the first blush, something rather——"

"Unpleasant," said Wimsey. "If you knew how often I'd heard that word in the last two days! Well, let's face it. Let's admit, straight away, that, once rigor sets in, it stays in till it starts to pass off, and that, when it *does* start to go it usually begins with the face and jaw, and not suddenly in one knee-joint. Now Fentiman's jaw and neck were as rigid as wood—I felt 'em. But the left leg swung loose from the knee. Now how do you explain that?"

"It is extremely puzzling. As no doubt you are aware, the obvious explanation would be that the joint had been forcibly loosened by somebody or something, after rigor had set in. In that case of course, it wouldn't stiffen up again. It would remain loose until the whole body relaxed. But how it happened——"

"That's just it. Dead people don't go about jamming their legs into things and forcing their own joints. And surely, if anybody had found the body like that he would have mentioned it. I mean, can you imagine one of the waiter-johnnies, for instance, finding an old gentleman stiff as a poker in the best arm-chair and then just givin' him a dose of knee-jerks and leavin' him there?"

"The only thing I could think of," said Penberthy, "was that a waiter or somebody had found him, and tried to move him—and then got frightened and barged off without saying anything. It sounds absurd. But people do do odd things, especially if they're scared."

"But what was there to be scared of?"

"It might seem alarming to a man in a very nervous state. We have one or two shell-shock cases here that I wouldn't answer for in an emergency. It would be worth considering, perhaps, if any one had shown special signs of agitation or shock that day."

"That's an idea," said Wimsey, slowly. "Suppose—suppose, for instance, there was somebody connected in some way with the General, who was in an unnerved state of mind—and suppose he came suddenly on this stiff corpse. You think he might—possibly—lose his head?"

"It's certainly possible. I can imagine that he might behave hysterically, or even violently, and force the knee-joint back with some unbalanced idea of straightening the body out and making it look more seemly. And then, you know, he might just run away from the thing and pretend it hadn't happened. Mind you, I'm not saying it was so, but I can easily see it happening. And that being so, I thought it better to say nothing about it. It would be a very unpl—distressing thing to bring to

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people's notice. And it might do untold harm to the nervous case to question him about it. I'd rather let sleeping dogs lie. There was nothing wrong about the death, that's definite. As for the rest—our duty is to the living; we can't help the dead.”

“Quite. Tell you what, though, I'll have a shot at finding out whether—we may as well say what we mean—whether George Fentiman was alone in the smoking-room at any time during the day. One of the servants may have noticed. It seems the only possible explanation. Well, thanks very much for your help. Oh, by the way, you said at the time that the rigor was passing off when we found the body—was that just camouflage, or does it still hold good?”

“It was just beginning to pass off in the face and jaw as a matter of fact. It had passed away completely by midnight.”

“Thanks. That's another fact, then. I like facts, and there are annoyin'ly few of them in this case. Won't you have another whisky?”

“No thanks. Due at my surgery. See you another time. Cheerio!”

Wimsey remained for a few moments after he had gone, smoking meditatively. Then he turned his chair to the table, took a sheet of paper from the rack and began to jot down a few notes of the case with his fountain-pen. He had not got far, however, before one of the Club servants entered,

peering into all the bays in turn, looking for somebody.

"Want me, Fred?"

"Your lordship's man is here, my lord, and says you may wish to be advised of his arrival."

"Quite right. I'm just coming." Wimsey took up the blotting-pad to blot his notes. Then his face changed. The corner of a sheet of paper protruded slightly. On the principle that nothing is too small to be looked at, Wimsey poked an inquisitive finger between the leaves, and extracted the paper. It bore a few scrawls relating to sums of money, very carelessly and shakily written. Wimsey looked at it attentively for a moment or two, and shook the blotter to see if it held anything further. Then he folded the sheet, handling it with extreme care by the corners, put it in an envelope and filed it away in his note-case. Coming out of the library, he found Bunter waiting in the hall, camera and tripod in hand.

"Ah, here you are, Bunter. Just a minute, while I see the Secretary." He looked in at the office, and found Culyer immersed in some accounts.

"Oh, I say, Culyer—'mornin' and all that—yes, disgustingly healthy, thanks, always am—I say, you recollect old Fentiman poppin' off in that inconsiderate way a little time ago?"

"I'm not likely to forget it," said Culyer, with a wry face. "I've had three notes of complaint from

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Wetheridge—one, because the servants didn't notice the matter earlier, set of inattentive rascals and all that; two, because the undertaker's men had to take the coffin past his door and disturbed him; three, because somebody's lawyer came along and asked him questions—together with distant allusions to the telephones being out of order and a shortage of soap in the bathroom. Who'd be a secretary?"

"Awfully sorry for you," said Wimsey with a grin. "I'm not here to make trouble. *Au contraire*, as the man said in the Bay of Biscay when they asked if he'd dined. Fact is, there's a bit of a muddle about the exact minute when the old boy passed out—mind you, this is in strict confidence—and I'm havin' a look into it. Don't want a fuss made, but I'd like a few photographs of the place, just to look at in absence and keep the lie of the land under my hawk-like optic, what? I've got my man here with a camera. D'you mind pretendin' he's the bloke from 'The Twaddler' or the 'Picture News,' or something, and givin' him your official blessin' while he totters round with the doings?"

"Mysterious idiot—of course, if you like. Though how photographs of the place to-day are going to give you a line on the time of a death which happened ten days ago, I don't pretend to understand. But, I say—it's all fair and above-board? We don't want any——"

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"Of course not. That's the idea. Strictest confidence—any sum up to £50,000 on your note of hand alone, delivered in plain vans, no reference needed. Trust little Peter."

"Oh, right-ho! What d'you want done?"

"I don't want to go round with Bunter. Give the show away. May he be called in here?"

"Certainly."

A servant was sent to fetch Bunter, who came in looking imperturbably prim and point-device. Wimsey looked him over and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Bunter, but you don't look in the least like the professional photographer from 'The Twaddler.' That dark-gray suit is all right, but you haven't got quite the air of devil-may-care seediness that marks the giants of Fleet Street. D'you mind stickin' all those dark-slides into one pocket and a few odd lenses and doodahs into the other, and rufflin' your manly locks a trifle? That's better. Why have you no pyro stains on the right thumb and forefinger?"

"I attribute it, my lord, principally to the circumstance that I prefer metol-quinol for the purpose of development."

"Well, you can't expect an outsider to grasp a thing like that. Wait a minute. Culyer, you seem to have a fairly juicy pipe there. Give us a cleaner."

Wimsey thrust the instrument energetically

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through the stem of the pipe, bringing out a revolting collection of brown, oily matter.

"Nicotine poisoning, Culyer—that's what you'll die of if you aren't jolly careful. Here you are, Bunter. Judiciously smeared upon the finger tips, that should give quite the right effect. Now, look here, Mr. Culyer here will take you round. I want a shot of the smoking-room from the entrance, a close up of the fireplace, showing General Fentiman's usual chair, and another shot from the door of the ante-room that leads into the library. Another shot through the ante-room into the library, and some careful studies of the far bay of the library from all points of view. After that, I want two or three views of the hall, and a shot of the cloak-room; get the attendant there to show you which was General Fentiman's customary peg, and take care that that gets into the picture. That's all for the moment, but you can take anything else that seems necessary for purposes of camouflage. And I want all the detail you can possibly get in, so stop down to whatever it is and take as long as you like. You'll find me knocking about somewhere when you've finished, and you'd better get some more plates in, because we're going on to another place."

"Very good, my lord."

"Oh, and, Culyer, by the way. Dr. Penberthy sent a female in to lay the General out, didn't

he? D'you happen to remember when she arrived?"

"About nine o'clock the next morning, I think."

"Have you got her name, by any chance?"

"I don't think so. But I know she came from Merritt's, the undertakers—round Shepherd's Market way. They'd probably put you on to her."

"Thanks frightfully, Culyer. I'll make myself scarce now. Carry on, Bunter."

Wimsey thought for a moment; then strolled across to the smoking-room, exchanged a mute greeting with one or two of the assembled veterans, picked up the "Morning Post," and looked round for a seat. The great arm-chair with ears still stood before the fire, but some dim feeling of respect for the dead had left it vacant. Wimsey sauntered over to it, and dropped lazily into its well-sprung depths. A veteran close at hand looked angrily at him and rustled the "Times" loudly. Wimsey ignored these signals, barricading himself behind his paper. The veteran sank back again, muttering something about "young men" and "no decency." Wimsey sat on unmoved, and paid no attention, even when a man from "The Twaddler" came in, escorted by the Secretary, to take photographs of the smoking-room. A few sensitives retired before this attack. Wetheridge waddled away with a grumbling protest into the library. It gave Wimsey considerable

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satisfaction to see the relentless camera pursue him into that stronghold.

It was half-past twelve before a waiter approached Lord Peter to say that Mr. Culyer would be glad to speak to him for a moment. In the office, Bunter reported his job done, and was despatched to get some lunch and a fresh supply of plates. Wimsey presently went down to the dining-room, where he found Wetheridge already established, getting the first cut off the saddle of mutton, and grumbling at the wine. Wimsey went deliberately over, greeted him heartily, and sat down at the same table.

Wetheridge said it was beastly weather. Wimsey agreed amiably. Wetheridge said it was scandalous, seeing what one paid for one's food in this place, that one couldn't get anything fit to eat. Wimsey, who was adored by chef and waiters alike for his appreciation of good food, and had been sent the choicest cut without having to ask for it, sympathized with this sentiment too. Wetheridge said he had been chased all over the Club that morning by an infernal photographer fellow, and that one got no peace these days with all this confounded publicity. Wimsey said it was all done for advertisement, and that advertisement was the curse of the age. Look at the papers—nothing but advertisements from cover to cover. Wetheridge said that in his time, by gad, a respectable Club would

have scorned advertisements, and that he could remember the time when newspapers were run by gentlemen for gentlemen. Wimsey said that nothing was what it had been; the thought it must be due to the War.

"Infernal slackness, that's what it is," said Wetheridge. "The service in this place is a disgrace. That fellow Culyer doesn't know his job. This week it's the soap. Would you believe it, there was none—actually none—in the bathroom yesterday. Had to ring for it. Made me late for dinner. Last week it was the telephone. Wanted to get through to a man down in Norfolk. Brother was a friend of mine—killed on the last day of the War, half an hour before the guns stopped firing—damnable shame—always ring up on Armistice Day, say a few words, don't you know—hr'rm!"

Wetheridge, having unexpectedly displayed this softer side of his character, relapsed into a snorting silence.

"Couldn't you get through, sir?" inquired Wimsey, with feeling. Anything that had happened at the Bellona Club on Armistice Day was of interest to him.

"I got *through* all right," said Wetheridge, morosely. "But, confound it all, I had to go down to the cloak-room to get a call from one of the boxes there. Didn't want to hang about the entrance. Too many imbeciles coming in and out. Exchanging

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silly anecdotes. Why a solemn national occasion should be an excuse for all these fools meeting and talking rot, I don't know."

"Beastly annoyin'. But why didn't you tell 'em to put the call through to the box by the library?"

"Aren't I telling you? The damned thing was out of order. Damned great notice stuck across it as cool as you please—'Instrument out of order.' Just like that. No apology. Nothing. Sickening, I call it. I told the fellow at the switch-board it was a disgrace. And all he said was, he hadn't put the notice up, but he'd draw attention to the matter."

"It was all right in the evening," said Wimsey, "because I saw Colonel Marchbanks using it."

"I know it was. And then, dashed if we didn't get the fool thing ringing, ringing at intervals all the next morning. Infuriating noise. When I told Fred to stop it, he just said it was the Telephone Company testing the line. They've no business to make a row like that. Why can't they test it quietly, that's what I want to know?"

Wimsey said telephones were an invention of the devil. Wetheridge grumbled his way through to the end of lunch, and departed. Wimsey returned to the entrance-hall, where he found the assistant commissioner on duty, and introduced himself.

Weston, however, was of no assistance. He had not noticed General Fentiman's arrival on the eleventh. He was not acquainted with many of the

members, having only just taken over his new duties. He thought it odd that he should not have noticed so very venerable a gentleman, but the fact remained that he had not. He regretted it extremely. Wimsey gathered that Weston was annoyed at having lost a chance of reflected celebrity. He had missed his scoop, as the reporters say.

Nor was the hall-porter any more helpful. The morning of November 11th had been a busy one. He had been in and out of his little glass pigeon-hole continually, shepherding guests into various rooms to find the members they wanted, distributing letters and chatting to country members who visited the Bellona seldom and liked to "have a chat with Piper" when they did. He could not recollect seeing the General. Wimsey began to feel that there must have been a conspiracy to overlook the old gentleman on the last morning of his life.

"You don't think he never was here at all, do you, Bunter?" he suggested. "Walkin' about invisible and tryin' hard to communicate, like the unfortunate ghost in that story of somebody or other's?"

Bunter was inclined to reject the psychic view of the case. "The General must have been here in the body, my lord, because there *was* the body."

"That's true," said Wimsey. "I'm afraid we can't explain away the body. S'pose that means I'll have

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to question every member of this beastly Club separately. But just at the moment I think we'd better go round to the General's flat and hunt up Robert Fentiman. Weston, get me a taxi, please."

CHAPTER VI

A Card of Re-Entry

THE DOOR OF THE LITTLE FLAT IN DOVER STREET was opened by an elderly man-servant, whose anxious face bore signs of his grief at his master's death. He informed them that Major Fentiman was at home and would be happy to receive Lord Peter Wimsey. As he spoke, a tall, soldierly man of about forty-five came out from one of the rooms and hailed his visitor cheerily.

"That you, Wimsey? Murbles told me to expect you. Come in. Haven't seen you for a long time. Hear you're turning into a regular Sherlock. Smart bit of work that was you put in over your brother's little trouble. What's all this? Camera? Bless me, you're going to do our little job in the professional manner, eh? Woodward, see that Lord Peter's man has everything he wants. Have you had lunch? Well, you'll have a spot of something, I take it, before you start measuring up the footprints. Come along. We're a bit at sixes and sevens here, but you won't mind."

He led the way into the small, austere-furnished sitting room.

"Thought I might as well camp here for a bit, while I get the old man's belongings settled up. It's going to be a deuce of a job, though, with all this fuss about the will. However, I'm his executor, so all this part of it falls to me in any case. It's very decent of you to lend us a hand. Queer old girl, Great-aunt Dormer. Meant well, you know, but made it damned awkward for everybody. How are you getting along?"

Wimsey explained the failure of his researches at the Bellona.

"Thought I'd better get a line on it at this end," he added. "If we know exactly what time he left here in the morning, we ought to be able to get an idea of the time he got to the Club."

Fentiman screwed his mouth into a whistle.

"But, my dear old egg, didn't Murbles tell you the snag?"

"He told me nothing. Left me to get on with it. What *is* the snag?"

"Why, don't you see, the old boy never came home that night."

"Never came home?—Where was he, then?"

"Dunno. That's the puzzle. All we know is . . . wait a minute, this is Woodward's story; he'd better tell you himself. Woodward!"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Lord Peter Wimsey the story you told me—about that telephone-call, you know."

"Yes, sir. About nine o'clock . . ."

"Just a moment," said Wimsey, "I do like a story to begin at the beginning. Let's start with the morning—the mornin' of November 10th. Was the General all right that morning? Usual health and spirits and all that?"

"Entirely so, my lord. General Fentiman was accustomed to rise early, my lord, being a light sleeper, as was natural at his great age. He had his breakfast in bed at a quarter to eight—tea and buttered toast, with a hegg lightly boiled, as he did every day in the year. Then he got up, and I helped him to dress—that would be about half-past eight to nine, my lord. Then he took a little rest, after the exertion of dressing, and at a quarter to ten I fetched his hat, overcoat, muffler and stick, and saw him start off to walk to the Club. That was his daily routine. He seemed in very good spirits—and in his usual health. Of course, his heart was always frail, my lord, but he seemed no different from ordinary."

"I see. And in the ordinary way he'd just sit at the Club all day and come home—when, exactly?"

"I was accustomed to have his evening meal ready for him at half-past seven precisely, my lord."

"Did he always turn up to time?"

"Invariably so, my lord. Everything as regular as on parade. That was the General's way. About

three o'clock in the afternoon, there was a ring on the telephone. We had the telephone put in, my lord, on account of the General's heart, so that we could always call up a medical man in case of emergency."

"Very right, too," put in Robert Fentiman.

"Yes, sir. General Fentiman was good enough to say, sir, he did not wish me to have the heavy responsibility of looking after him alone in case of illness. He was a very kind, thoughtful gentleman." The man's voice faltered.

"Just so," said Wimsey. "I'm sure you must be very sorry to lose him, Woodward. Still, one couldn't expect otherwise, you know. I'm sure you looked after him splendidly. What was it happened about three o'clock?"

"Why, my lord, they rang up from Lady Dormer's to say as how her ladyship was very ill, and would General Fentiman please come at once if he wanted to see her alive. So I went down to the Club myself. I didn't like to telephone, you see, because General Fentiman was a little hard of hearing—though he had his faculties wonderful well for a gentleman of his age—and he never liked the telephone. Besides, I was afraid of the shock it might be to him, seeing his heart was so weak—which, of course, at his age you couldn't hardly expect otherwise—so that was why I went myself."

"That was very considerate of you."

"Thank you, my lord. Well, I see General Fentiman, and I give him the message—careful-like, and breaking it gently as you might say. I could see he was took aback a bit, but he just sits thinking for a few minutes, and then he says, 'Very well, Woodward, I will go. It is certainly my duty to go.' So I wraps him up careful, and gets him a taxi, and he says, 'You needn't come with me, Woodward. I don't quite know how long I shall stay there. They will see that I get home quite safely.' So I told the man where to take him and came back to the flat. And that, my lord, was the last time I see him."

Wimsey made a sympathetic clucking sound.

"Yes, my lord. When General Fentiman didn't return at his usual time, I thought he was maybe staying to dine at Lady Dormer's, and took no notice of it. However, at half-past eight, I began to be afraid of the night-air for him; it was very cold that day, my lord, if you remember. At nine o'clock, I was just thinking of calling up the household at Lady Dormer's to ask when he was to be expected home, when the 'phone rang."

"At nine exactly?"

"About nine. It might have been a little later, but not more than a quarter-past at latest. It was a gentleman spoke to me. He said: 'Is that General Fentiman's flat?' I said, 'Yes, who is it,

please?' And he said, 'Is that Woodward?' giving my name, just like that. And I said 'Yes.' And he said, 'Oh, Woodward, General Fentiman wishes me to tell you not to wait up for him, as he is spending the night with me.' So I said, 'Excuse me, sir, who is it speaking, please?' And he said, 'Mr. Oliver.' So I asked him to repeat the name, not having heard it before, and he said 'Oliver'—it came over very plain, 'Mr. Oliver,' he said, 'I'm an old friend of General Fentiman's, and he is staying to-night with me, as we have some business to talk over.' So I said, 'Does the General require anything, sir?'—thinking, you know, my lord, as he might wish to have his sleeping-suit and his tooth-brush or somethink of that, but the gentleman said no, he had got everything necessary and I was not to trouble myself. Well, of course, my lord, as I explained to Major Fentiman, I didn't like to take upon myself to ask questions, being only in service, my lord; it might seem taking a liberty. But I was very much afraid of the excitement and staying up late being too much for the General, so I went so far as to say I hoped General Fentiman was in good health and not tiring of himself, and Mr. Oliver laughed and said he would take very good care of him and send him to bed straight away. And I was just about to make so bold as to ask him where he lived, when he rang off. And that was all I knew till I heard

next day of the General being dead, my lord."

"There now," said Robert Fentiman. "What do you think of that?"

"Odd," said Wimsey, "and most unfortunate as it turns out. Did the General often stay out at night, Woodward?"

"Never, my lord. I don't recollect such a thing happening once in five or six years. In the old days, perhaps, he'd visit friends occasionally, but not of late."

"And you'd never heard of this Mr. Oliver?"

"No, my lord."

"His voice wasn't familiar?"

"I couldn't say but what I might have heard it before, my lord, but I find it very difficult to recognize voices on the telephone. But I thought at the time it might be one of the gentlemen from the Club."

"Do *you* know anything about the man, Fentiman?"

"Oh, yes—I've met him. At least, I suppose it's the same man. But I know nothing about him. I fancy I ran across him once in some frightful crush or other, a public dinner, or something of that kind, and he said he knew my grandfather. And I've seen him lunching at Gatti's and that sort of thing. But I haven't the remotest idea where he lives or what he does."

"Army man?"

"No—something in the engineering line, I fancy."

"What's he like?"

"Oh, tall, thin, gray hair and spectacles. About sixty-five to look at. He may be older—must be, if he's an old friend of grandfather's. I gathered he was retired from whatever it is he did, and lived in some suburb, but I'm hanged if I can remember which."

"Not very helpful," said Wimsey. "D'you know, occasionally I think there's quite a lot to be said for women."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, I mean, all this easy, uninquisitive way men have of makin' casual acquaintances is very fine and admirable and all that—but look how inconvenient it is! Here you are. You admit you've met this bloke two or three times, and all you know about him is that he is tall and thin and retired into some unspecified suburb. A woman, with the same opportunities, would have found out his address and occupation, whether he was married, how many children he had, with their names and what they did for a living, what his favourite author was, what food he liked best, the name of his tailor, dentist and bootmaker, when he knew your grandfather and what he thought of him—screeds of useful stuff!"

"So she would," said Fentiman, with a grin. "That's why I've never married."

"I quite agree," said Wimsey, "but the fact remains that as a source of information you're simply a wash-out. Do, for goodness' sake, pull yourself together and try to remember something a bit more definite about the fellow. It may mean half a million to you to know what time grand-pa set off in the morning from Tooting Bec or Finchley or wherever it was. If it was a distant suburb, it would account for his arriving rather late at the Club—which is rather in your favour, by the way."

"I suppose it is. I'll do my best to remember. But I'm not sure that I ever knew."

"It's awkward," said Wimsey. "No doubt the police could find the man for us, but it's not a police case. And I don't suppose you particularly want to advertise."

"Well—it may come to that. But naturally, we're not keen on publicity if we can avoid it. If only I could remember exactly what work he said he'd been connected with."

"Yes—or the public dinner or whatever it was where you first met him. One might get hold of a list of the guests."

"My dear Wimsey—that was two or three years ago!"

"Or maybe they know the blighter at Gatti's."

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"That's an idea. I've met him there several times. Tell you what, I'll go along there and make inquiries, and if they don't know him, I'll make a point of lunching there pretty regularly. He's almost bound to turn up again."

"Right. You do that. And meanwhile, do you mind if I have a look round the flat?"

"Rather not. D'you want me? Or would you rather have Woodward? He really knows a lot more about things."

"Thanks. I'll have Woodward. Don't mind me. I shall just be fussing about."

"Carry on by all means. I've got one or two drawers full of papers to go through. If I come across anything bearing on the Oliver bloke I'll yell out to you."

"Right."

Wimsey went out, leaving him to it, and joined Woodward and Bunter, who were conversing in the next room. A glance told Wimsey that this was the General's bedroom.

On a table beside the narrow iron bedstead was an old-fashioned writing-desk. Wimsey took it up, weighed it in his hands a moment and then took it to Robert Fentiman in the other room. "Have you opened this?" he asked.

"Yes—only old letters and things."

"You didn't come across Oliver's address, I suppose?"

"No. Of course I looked for that."

"Looked anywhere else? Any drawers? Cupboards? That sort of thing?"

"Not so far," said Fentiman, rather shortly.

"No telephone memorandum or anything—you've tried the telephone-book, I suppose?"

"Well, no—I can't very well ring up perfect strangers and—"

"And sing 'em the Froth-Blowers' Anthem? Good God, man, anybody'd think you were chasing a lost umbrella, not half a million of money. The man rang you up, so he may very well be on the 'phone himself. Better let Bunter tackle the job. He has an excellent manner on the line; people find it a positive pleasure to be tr-r-roubled by him."

Robert Fentiman greeted this feeble pleasantry with an indulgent grin, and produced the telephone directory, to which Bunter immediately applied himself. Finding two-and-a-half columns of Olivers, he removed the receiver and started to work steadily through them in rotation. Wimsey returned to the bedroom. It was in apple-pie order—the bed neatly made, the wash-hand apparatus set in order, as though the occupant might return at any moment, every speck of dust removed—a tribute to Woodward's reverent affection, but a depressing sight for an investigator. Wimsey sat down, and let his eye rove slowly from

the hanging wardrobe, with its polished doors, over the orderly line of boots and shoes arranged on their trees on a small shelf, the dressing table, the washstand, the bed and the chest of drawers which, with the small bedside table and a couple of chairs, comprised the furniture.

"Did the General shave himself, Woodward?"

"No, my lord; not latterly. That was my duty, my lord."

"Did he brush his own teeth, or dental plate, or whatever it was?"

"Oh, yes, my lord. General Fentiman had an excellent set of teeth for his age."

Wimsey fixed his powerful monocle into his eye, and carried the tooth-brush over to the window. The result of the scrutiny was unsatisfactory. He looked round again.

"Is that his walking-stick?"

"Yes, my lord."

"May I see it?"

Woodward brought it across, carrying it, after the manner of a well-trained servant, by the middle. Lord Peter took it from him in the same manner, suppressing a slight, excited smile. The stick was a heavy malacca, with a thick crutch-handle of polished ivory, suitable for sustaining the feeble steps of old age. The monocle came into play again, and this time its owner gave a chuckle of pleasure.

"I shall want to take a photograph of this stick presently, Woodward. Will you be very careful to see that it is not touched by anybody beforehand?"

"Certainly, my lord."

Wimsey stood the stick carefully in its corner again, and then, as though it had put a new train of ideas into his mind, walked across to the shoe-shelf.

"Which were the shoes General Fentiman was wearing at the time of his death?"

"These, my lord."

"Have they been cleaned since?"

Woodward looked a trifle stricken.

"Not to say cleaned, my lord. I just wiped them over with a duster. They were not very dirty, and somehow—I hadn't the heart—if you'll excuse me, my lord."

"That's very fortunate."

Wimsey turned them over and examined the soles very carefully, both with the lens and with the naked eye. With a small pair of tweezers, taken from his pocket, he delicately removed a small fragment of pile—apparently from a thick carpet—which was clinging to a projecting brad, and stored it carefully away in an envelope. Then, putting the right shoe aside, he subjected the left to a prolonged scrutiny, especially about the inner edge of the sole. Finally he asked for a sheet of paper, and wrapped the shoe up as tenderly as

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though it had been a piece of priceless Waterford glass.

"I should like to see all the clothes General Fentiman was wearing that day—the outer garments, I mean—hat, suit, overcoat and so on."

The garments were produced, and Wimsey went over every inch of them with the same care and patience, watched by Woodward with flattering attention.

"Have they been brushed?"

"No, my lord—only shaken out." This time Woodward offered no apology, having grasped dimly that polishing and brushing were not acts which called for approval under these unusual circumstances.

"You see," said Wimsey, pausing for a moment to note an infinitesimally small ruffling of the threads on the left-hand trouser leg, "we might be able to get some sort of a clew from the dust on the clothes, if any—to show us where the General spent the night. If—to take a rather unlikely example—we were to find a lot of sawdust, for instance, we might suppose that he had been visiting a carpenter. Or a dead leaf might suggest a garden or a common, or something of that sort. While a cobweb might mean a wine-cellar, or—or a potting-shed—and so on. You see?"

"Yes, my lord" (rather doubtfully).

"You don't happen to remember noticing that

little tear—well, it's hardly a tear—just a little roughness. It might have caught on a nail."

"I can't say I recollect it, my lord. But I might have overlooked it."

"Of course. It's probably of no importance. Well—lock the things up carefully. It's just possible I might have to have the dust extracted and analyzed. Just a moment—Has anything been removed from these clothes? The pockets were emptied, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lord."

"There was nothing unusual in them?"

"No, my lord. Nothing but what the General always took out with him. Just his handkerchief, keys, money and cigar-case."

"H'm. How about the money?"

"Well, my lord—I couldn't say exactly as to that. Major Fentiman has got it all. There was two pound notes in his note-case, I remember. I believe he had two pounds ten when he went out, and some loose silver in the trouser pocket. He'd have paid his taxi-fare and his lunch at the Club out of the ten-shilling note."

"That shows he didn't pay for anything unusual, then, in the way of train or taxis backwards and forwards, or dinner, or drinks."

"No, my lord."

"But naturally, this Oliver fellow would see to all that. Did the General have a fountain pen?"

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"No, my lord. He did very little writing, my lord. I was accustomed to write any necessary letters to tradesmen, and so on."

"What sort of nib did he use, when he did write?"

"A J pen, my lord. You will find it in the sitting-room. But mostly I believe he wrote his letters at the Club. He had a very small private correspondence—it might be a letter or so to the Bank or to his man of business, my lord."

"I see. Have you his check-book?"

"Major Fentiman has it, my lord."

"Do you remember whether the General had it with him when he last went out?"

"No, my lord. It was kept in his writing desk as a rule. He would write the checks for the household here, my lord, and give them to me. Or occasionally he might take the book down to the Club with him."

"Ah! well, it doesn't look as though the mysterious Mr. Oliver was one of those undesirable blokes who demand money. Right you are, Woodward. You're perfectly certain that you removed nothing whatever from those clothes except what was in the pockets?"

"I am quite positive of that, my lord."

"That's very odd," said Wimsey, half to himself. "I'm not sure that it isn't the oddest thing about the case."

"Indeed, my lord? Might I ask why?"

"Why," said Wimsey, "I should have expected—" he checked himself. Major Fentiman was looking in at the door.

"What's odd, Wimsey?"

"Oh, just a little thing struck me," said Wimsey, vaguely. "I expected to find something among those clothes which isn't there. That's all."

"Impenetrable sleuth," said the major, laughing. "What are you driving at?"

"Work it out for yourself, my dear Watson," said his lordship, grinning like a dog. "You have all the data. Work it out for yourself, and let me know the answer."

Woodward, a trifle pained by this levity, gathered up the garments and put them away in the wardrobe.

"How's Bunter getting on with those calls?"

"No luck, at present."

"Oh!—well, he'd better come in now and do some photographs. We can finish the telephoning at home. Bunter!—Oh, and, I say, Woodward—d'you mind if we take your finger-prints?"

"Finger-prints, my lord?"

"Good God, you're not trying to fasten anything on Woodward?"

"Fasten what?"

"Well—I mean, I thought it was only burglars and people who had finger-prints taken."

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"Not exactly. No—I want the General's fingerprints, really, to compare them with some others I got at the Club. There's a very fine set on that walking-stick of his, and I want Woodward's, just to make sure I'm not getting the two sets mixed up. I'd better take yours, too. It's just possible you might have handled the stick without noticing."

"Oh, I get you, Steve. I don't think I've touched the thing, but it's as well to make sure, as you say. Funny sort of business, what? Quite the Scotland Yard touch. How d'you do it?"

"Bunter will show you."

Bunter immediately produced a small inking-pad and roller, and a number of sheets of smooth, white paper. The fingers of the two candidates were carefully wiped with a clean cloth, and pressed first on the pad and then on the paper. The impressions thus obtained were labeled and put away in envelopes, after which the handle of the walking-stick was lightly dusted with gray powder, bringing to light an excellent set of prints of a right-hand set of fingers, super-imposed here and there, but quite identifiable. Fentiman and Woodward gazed fascinated at this entertaining miracle.

"Are they all right?"

"Perfectly so, sir; they are quite unlike either of the other two specimens."

"Then presumably they're the General's. Hurry up and get a negative."

Bunter set up the camera and focussed it.

"Unless," observed Major Fentiman, "they are Mr. Oliver's. That would be a good joke, wouldn't it?"

"It would, indeed," said Wimsey, a little taken aback. "A very good joke—on somebody. And for the moment, Fentiman, I'm not sure which of us would do the laughing."

CHAPTER VII

The Curse of Scotland

WHAT WITH TELEPHONE CALLS AND THE DEVELOPMENT of photographs, it appeared obvious that Bunter was booked for a busy afternoon. His master, therefore, considerably left him in possession of the flat in Piccadilly, and walked abroad to divert himself in his own peculiar way.

His first visit was to one of those offices which undertake to distribute advertisements to the press. Here he drew up an advertisement addressed to taxi-drivers and arranged for it to appear, at the earliest possible date, in all the papers which men of that profession might be expected to read. Three drivers were requested to communicate with Mr. J. Murbles, Solicitor, of Staple Inn, who would recompense them amply for their time and trouble. First: any driver who remembered taking up an aged gentleman from Lady Dormer's house in Portman Square or the near vicinity on the afternoon of November 10th. Secondly: any driver who recollected taking up an aged gentleman at or near Dr. Penberthy's house in Harley Street at some

time in the afternoon or evening of November 10th. And thirdly: any driver who had deposited a similarly aged gentleman at the door of the Bellona Club between 10 and 12.30 in the morning of November 11th.

"Though probably," thought Wimsey, as he footed the bill for the insertions, to run for three days unless cancelled, "Oliver had a car and ran the old boy up himself. Still, it's just worth trying."

He had a parcel under his arm, and his next proceeding was to hail a cab and drive to the residence of Sir James Lubbock, the well-known analyst. Sir James was fortunately at home and delighted to see Lord Peter. He was a square-built man, with a reddish face and strongly-curling gray hair, and received his visitor in his laboratory, where he was occupied in superintending a Marsh's test for arsenic.

"D'ye mind just taking a pew for a moment, while I finish this off?"

Wimsey took the pew and watched, interested, the flame from the Bunsen burner playing steadily upon the glass tube, and the dark brown deposit slowly forming and deepening at the narrow end. From time to time, the analyst poured down the thistle-funnel a small quantity of a highly disagreeable-looking liquid from a stoppered phial; once his assistant came forward to add a few more

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drops of what Wimsey knew must be hydrochloric acid. Presently, the disagreeable liquid having all been transferred to the flask, and the deposit having deepened almost to black at its densest part, the tube was detached and taken away, and the burner extinguished, and Sir James Lubbock, after writing and signing a brief note, turned round and greeted Wimsey cordially.

"Sure I am not interrupting you, Lubbock?"

"Not a scrap. We've just finished. That was the last mirror. We shall be ready in good time for our appearance in Court. Not that there's much doubt about it. Enough of the stuff to kill an elephant. Considering the obliging care we take in criminal prosecutions to inform the public at large that two or three grains of arsenic will successfully account for an unpopular individual, however tough, it's surprising how wasteful people are with their drugs. You can't teach 'em. An office-boy who was as incompetent as the average murderer would be sacked with a kick in the bottom. Well, now! and what's your little trouble?"

"A small matter," said Wimsey, unrolling his parcel and producing General Fentiman's left boot, "it's cheek to come to you about it. But I want very much to know what this is, and as it's strictly a private matter, I took the liberty of bargin' round to you in a friendly way. Just along the inside of the sole, there—on the edge."

"Blood?" suggested the analyst, grinning.

"Well, no—sorry to disappoint you. More like paint, I fancy."

Sir James looked closely at the deposit with a powerful lens.

"Yes; some sort of brown varnish. Might be off a floor or a piece of furniture. Do you want an analysis?"

"If it's not too much trouble."

"Not at all. I think we'll get Saunders to do it; he has made rather a specialty of this kind of thing. Saunders, would you scrape this off carefully and see what it is? Get a slide of it, and make an analysis of the rest, if you can. How soon is it wanted?"

"Well, I'd like it as soon as possible. I don't mean within the next five minutes."

"Well, stay and have a spot of tea with us, and I dare say we can get something ready for you by then. It doesn't look anything out of the way. Knowing your tastes, I'm still surprised it isn't blood. Have you no blood in prospect?"

"Not that I know of. I'll stay to tea with pleasure, if you're certain I'm not being a bore."

"Never that. Besides, while you're here, you might give me your opinion on those old medical books of mine. I don't suppose they're particularly valuable, but they're quaint. Come along."

Wimsey passed a couple of hours agreeably with

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Lady Lubbock and crumpets and a dozen or so antiquated anatomical treatises. Presently Saunders returned with his report. The deposit was nothing more nor less than an ordinary brown paint and varnish of a kind well known to joiners and furniture-makers. It was a modern preparation, with nothing unusual about it; one might find it anywhere. It was not a floor-varnish—one would expect to meet it on a door or partition or something of that sort. The chemical formula followed.

"Not very helpful, I'm afraid," said Sir James.

"You never know your luck," replied Wimsey. "Would you be good enough to label the slide and sign your name to it, and to the analysis, and keep them both by you for reference in case they're wanted?"

"Sure thing. How do you want 'em labeled?"

"Well—put down 'Varnish from General Fentiman's left boot,' and 'Analysis of varnish from General Fentiman's left boot,' and the date, and I'll sign it, and you and Saunders can sign it, and then I think we shall be all right."

"Fentiman? Was that the old boy who died suddenly the other day?"

"It was. But it's no use looking at me with that child-like air of intelligent taking-notice, because I haven't got any gory yarn to spin. It's only a question of where the old man spent the night, if you *must* know."

"Curiouser and curiouser. Never mind, it's nothing to do with me. Perhaps when it's all over, you'll tell me what it's about. Meanwhile the labels shall go on. You, I take it, are ready to witness to the identity of the boot, and I can witness to having seen the varnish on the boot, and Saunders can witness that he removed the varnish from the boot and analyzed it and that this is the varnish he analyzed. All according to Cocker. Here you are. Sign here and here, and that will be eight-and-sixpence, please."

"It might be cheap at eight-and-sixpence," said Wimsey. "It might even turn out to be cheap at eight hundred and sixty quid—or eight thousand and sixty."

Sir James Lubbock looked properly thrilled.

"You're only doing it to annoy, because you know it teases. Well, if you must be sphinx-like, you must. I'll keep these things under lock and key for you. Do you want the boot back?"

"I don't suppose the executor will worry. And a fellow looks such a fool carrying a boot about. Put it away with the other things till called for, there's a good man."

So the boot was put away in a cupboard, and Lord Peter was free to carry on with his afternoon's entertainment.

His first idea was to go on up to Finsbury Park, to see the George Fentimans. He remembered in

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time, however, that Sheila would not yet be home from her work—she was employed as cashier in a fashionable tea-shop—and further (with a forethought rare in the well-to-do) that if he arrived too early he would have to be asked to supper, and that there would be very little supper and that Sheila would be worried about it and George annoyed. So he turned in to one of his numerous Clubs, and had a Sole Colbert very well cooked, with a bottle of Liebfraumilch; an Apple Charlotte and light savoury to follow, and black coffee and a rare old brandy to top up with—a simple and satisfactory meal which left him in the best of tempers.

The George Fentimans lived in two ground-floor rooms with use of kitchen and bathroom in a semi-detached house with a blue and yellow fanlight over the door and Madras muslin over the windows. They were really furnished apartments, but the landlady always referred to them as a flat, because that meant that tenants had to do their own work and provide their own service. The house felt stuffy as Lord Peter entered it, because somebody was frying fish in oil at no great distance, and a slight unpleasantness was caused at the start by the fact that he had rung only once, thus bringing up the person in the basement, whereas a better-instructed caller would have rung twice, to indicate that he wanted the ground floor.

Hearing explanations in the hall, George put his head out of the dining-room and said, "Oh! hullo!"

"Hullo," said Wimsey, trying to find room for his belongings on an overladen hat-stand, and eventually disposing of them on the handle of a perambulator. "Thought I'd just come and look you up. Hope I'm not in the way."

"Of course not. Jolly good of you to penetrate to this ghastly hole. Come in. Everything's in a beastly muddle as usual, but when you're poor you have to live like pigs. Sheila, here's Lord Peter Wimsey—you have met, haven't you?"

"Yes, of course, How nice of you to come round. Have you had dinner?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Coffee?"

"No, thanks, really—I've only just had some."

"Well," said George, "there's only whisky to offer you."

"Later on, perhaps, thanks, old man. Not just now. I've had a brandy. Never mix grape and grain."

"Wise man," said George, his brow clearing, since as a matter of fact, there was no whisky nearer than the public-house, and acceptance would have meant six-and-six, at least, besides the exertion of fetching it.

Sheila Fentiman drew an armchair forward, and

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herself sat down on a low pouffe. She was a woman of thirty-five or so, and would have been very good-looking but for an appearance of worry and ill-health that made her look older than her age.

"It's a miserable fire," said George, gloomily, "is this all the coal there is?"

"I'm sorry," said Sheila, "she didn't fill it up properly this morning."

"Well, why can't you see that she does? It's always happening. If the scuttle isn't absolutely empty she seems to think she needn't bother about filling it up."

"I'll get some."

"No, it's all right. I'll go. But you ought to tell her about it."

"I will—I'm always telling her."

"The woman's no more sense than a hen. No—don't you go, Sheila—I won't have you carrying coal."

"Nonsense," said his wife, rather acidly. "What a hypocrite you are, George. It's only because there's somebody here that you're so chivalrous all at once."

"Here, let me," said Wimsey, desperately, "I like fetching coal. Always loved coal as a kid. Anything grubby or noisy. Where is it? Lead me to it!"

Mrs. Fentiman released the scuttle, for which George and Wimsey politely struggled. In the end they all went out together to the inconvenient bin

in the back yard, Wimsey quarrying the coal, George receiving it, in the scuttle and the lady lighting them with a long candle, insecurely fixed in an enamel candle-stick several sizes too large.

"And tell Mrs. Crickett," said George, irritably sticking to his grievance, "that she must fill that scuttle up properly every day."

"I'll try. But she hates being spoken to. I'm always afraid she'll give warning."

"Well, there are other charwomen, I suppose?"

"Mrs. Crickett is very honest."

"I know; but that's not everything. You could easily find one if you took the trouble."

"Well, I'll see about it. But why don't *you* speak to Mrs. Crickett? I'm generally out before she gets here."

"Oh, yes, I know. You needn't keep on rubbing it in about your having to go out to work. You don't suppose I *enjoy* it, do you? Wimsey can tell you how I feel about it."

"Don't be so silly, George. Why is it, Lord Peter, that men are so cowardly about speaking to servants?"

"It's the woman's job to speak to servants," said George, "no business of mine."

"All right—I'll speak, and you'll have to put up with the consequences."

"There won't *be* any consequences, my dear, if

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you do it tactfully. I can't think why you want to make all this fuss."

"Right-oh, I'll be as tactful as I can. You don't suffer from charladies, I suppose, Lord Peter?"

"Good lord, no!" interrupted George. "Wimsey lives decently. They don't know the dignified joys of hard-upness in Piccadilly."

"I'm rather lucky," said Wimsey, with that apologetic air which seems forced on anybody accused of too much wealth. "I have an extraordinarily faithful and intelligent man who looks after me like a mother."

"Daresay he knows when he's well off," said George, disagreeably.

"I dunno. I believe Bunter would stick to me whatever happened. He was my N.C.O. during part of the War, and we went through some roughish bits together, and after the whole thing was over I hunted him up and took him on. He was in service before that, of course, but his former master was killed and the family broken up, so he was quite pleased to come along. I don't know what I should do without Bunter now."

"Is that the man who takes the photographs for you when you are on a crime-hunt?" suggested Sheila, hurriedly seizing on this, as she hoped, non-irritant topic.

"Yes. He's a great hand with a camera. Only drawback is that he's occasionally immured in the

dark-room and I'm left to forage for myself. I've got a telephone extension through to him. 'Bunter?'—'Yes, my lord!'—'Where are my dress studs?'—'In the middle section of the third small right-hand drawer of the dressing-cabinet, my lord.'—'Bunter!'—'Yes, my lord.'—'Where have I put my cigarette case?'—'I fancy I observed it last on the piano, my lord.'—'Bunter!'—'Yes, my lord!'—'I've got into a muddle with my white tie.'—'Indeed, my lord?'—'Well, can't you do anything about it?'—'Excuse me, my lord, I am engaged in the development of a plate.'—'To hell with the plate!'—'Very good, my lord.'—'Bunter—stop—don't be precipitate—finish the plate and then come and tie my tie.'—'Certainly, my lord.' And then I have to sit about miserably till the infernal plate is fixed, or whatever it is. Perfect slave in my own house—that's what I am."

Sheila laughed.

"You look a very happy and well-treated slave. Are you investigating anything just now?"

"Yes. In fact—there you are again—Bunter has retired into photographic life for the evening. I haven't a roof to cover me. I have been wandering round like the what d'you call it bird, which has no feet——"

"I'm sorry you were driven to such desperation as to seek asylum in our poverty-stricken hovel," said George, with a sour laugh.

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Wimsey began to wish he had not come. Mrs. Fentiman looked vexed.

"You needn't answer that," she said, with an effort to be light, "there *is* no answer."

"I'll send it to Aunt Judith of 'Rosie's Weekly Bits,'" said Wimsey. "A makes a remark to which there is no answer. What is B to do?"

"Sorry," said George, "my conversation doesn't seem to be up to standard. I'm forgetting all my civilized habits. You'd better go on and pay no attention to me."

"What's the mystery on hand now?" asked Sheila, taking her husband at his word.

"Well, actually it's about this funny business of the old General's will," said Wimsey. "Murbles suggested I should have a look into the question of the survivorship."

"Oh, do you think you can really get it settled?"

"I hope so very much. But it's a very fine-drawn business—may resolve itself into a matter of seconds. By the way, Fentiman, were you in the Bellona smoking-room at all during the morning of Armistice Day?"

"So *that's* what you've come about. Why didn't you say so? No, I wasn't. And what's more, I don't know anything at all about it. And why that infuriating old hag of a Dormer woman couldn't make a decent, sensible will while she was about it, I don't know. Where was the sense of leaving all

those wads of money to the old man, when she knew perfectly well he was liable to peg out at any moment. And then, if he did die, handing the whole lot over to the Dorland girl, who hasn't an atom of claim on it? She might have had the decency to think about Robert and us a bit."

"Considering how rude you were to her and Miss Dorland, George, I wonder she even left you the seven thousand."

"What's seven thousand to her? Like a five-pound note to any ordinary person. An insult, I call it. I daresay I was rude to her, but I jolly well wasn't going to have her think I was sucking up to her for her money."

"How inconsistent you are, George. If you didn't want the money, why grumble about not getting it?"

"You're always putting me in the wrong. You know I don't mean that. I *didn't* want the money—but the Dorland girl was always hinting that I did, and I ticked her off. I didn't know anything about the confounded legacy, and I didn't want to. All I mean is, that if she did want to leave anything to Robert and me, she might have made it more than a rotten seven thousand apiece."

"Well! don't grumble at it. It would be uncommonly handy at the moment."

"I know—isn't that exactly what I'm saying? And now the old fool makes such a silly will that

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I don't know whether I'm to get it or not. I can't even lay hands on the old Governor's two thousand. I've got to sit here and twiddle my thumbs while Wimsey goes round with a tape measure and a tame photographer to see whether I'm entitled to my own grandfather's money!"

"I know it's frightfully trying, darling. But I expect it'll all come right soon. It wouldn't matter if it weren't for Dougal MacStewart."

"Who's Dougal MacStewart?" inquired Wimsey, suddenly alert. "One of our old Scottish families, by the name. I fancy I have heard of him. Isn't he an obliging, helpful kind of chap, with a wealthy friend in the City?"

"Frightfully obliging," said Sheila, grimly. "He simply forces his acquaintances on one. He——"

"Shut up, Sheila," interrupted her husband, rudely. "Lord Peter doesn't want to know all the sordid details of our private affairs."

"Knowing Dougal," said Wimsey, "I daresay I could give a guess at them. Some time ago you had a kind offer of assistance from our friend MacStewart. You accepted it to the mild tune of—what was it?"

"Five hundred," said Sheila.

"Five hundred. Which turned out to be three-fifty in cash and the rest represented by a little honorarium to his friend in the City who advanced

the money in so trustful a manner without security. When was that?"

"Three years ago—when I started that tea-shop in Kensington."

"Ah, yes. And when you couldn't quite manage that sixty per cent per month or whatever it was, owing to trade depression, the friend in the City was obliging enough to add the interest to the principal, at great inconvenience to himself—and so forth. The MacStewart way is familiar to me. What's the demd total now, Fentiman, just out of curiosity?"

"Fifteen hundred by the thirtieth," growled George, "if you must know."

"I warned George—" began Sheila, unwisely.

"Oh, you always know what's best! Anyhow, it was your tea business. I told you there was no money in it, but women always think they can run things on their own nowadays."

"I know, George. But it was MacStewart's interest that swallowed up the profits. You know I wanted you to borrow the money from Lady Dormer."

"Well, I wasn't going to, and that's flat. I told you so at the time."

"Well, but look here," said Wimsey, "you're perfectly all right about MacStewart's fifteen hundred, anyway, whichever way the thing goes. If General Fentiman died before his sister, you get

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seven thousand; if he died after her, you're certain of his two thousand, by the will. Besides, your brother will no doubt make a reasonable arrangement about sharing the money he gets as residuary legatee. Why worry?"

"Why? Because here's this infernal legal rigamarole tying the thing up and hanging it out till God knows when, and I can't touch anything."

"I know, I know," said Wimsey, patiently, "but all you've got to do is to go to Murbles and get him to advance you the money on your expectations. You can't get away with less than two thousand, whatever happens, so he'll be perfectly ready to do it. In fact, he's more or less bound to settle your just debts for you, if he's asked."

"That's just what I've been telling you, George," said Mrs. Fentiman, eagerly.

"Of course, you *would* be always telling me things. You never make mistakes, do you? And suppose the thing goes into Court and we get let in for thousands of pounds in fees and things, Mrs. Clever, eh?"

"I should leave it to your brother to go into Court, if necessary," said Wimsey, sensibly. "If he wins, he'll have plenty of cash for fees, and if he loses, you'll still have your seven thousand. You go to Murbles—he'll fix you up. Or, tell you what! —I'll get hold of friend MacStewart and see if I can't arrange to get the debt transferred to me.

He won't consent, of course, if he knows it's me, but I can probably do it through Murbles. Then we'll threaten to fight him on the ground of extortionate interest and so on. We'll have some fun with it."

"Dashed good of you, but I'd rather not, thanks."

"Just as you like. But anyway, go to Murbles. He'll get it squared up for you. Anyhow, I don't think there will be any litigation about the will. If we can't get to the bottom of the survivorship question, I should think you and Miss Dorland would be far better advised to come to a settlement out of Court. It would probably be the fairest way in any case. Why don't you?"

"Why? Because the Dorland female wants her pound of flesh. That's why!"

"Does she? What kind of woman is she?"

"One of these modern, Chelsea women. Ugly as sin and hard as nails. Paints things—ugly, skinny prostitutes with green bodies and no clothes on. I suppose she thinks if she can't be a success as a woman she'll be a half-baked intellectual. No wonder a man can't get a decent job these days with these hard-mouthed, cigarette-smoking females all over the place, pretending they're geniuses and business women and all the rest of it."

"Oh, come, George! Miss Dorland isn't doing anybody out of a job; she couldn't just sit there all

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day being Lady Dormer's companion. What's the harm in her painting things?"

"Why couldn't she be a companion? In the old days, heaps of unmarried women were companions, and let me tell you, my dear girl, they had a much better time than they have now, with all this jazzing and short skirts and pretending to have careers. The modern girl hasn't a scrap of decent feeling or sentiment about her. Money—money and notoriety, that's all she's after. That's what we fought the war for—and that's what we've come back to!"

"George, do keep to the point. Miss Dorland doesn't jazz—"

"I am keeping to the point. I'm talking about modern women. I don't say Miss Dorland in particular. But you *will* go taking everything personally. That's just like a woman. You can't argue about things in general—you always have to bring it down to some one little personal instance. You will side-track."

"I wasn't side-tracking. We started to talk about Miss Dorland."

"You said a person couldn't just be somebody's companion, and I said that in the old days plenty of nice women were companions and had a jolly good time——"

"I don't know about that."

"Well, I do. They did. And they learned to be

decent companions to their husbands, too. Not always flying off to offices and clubs and parties like they are now. And if you think men like that sort of thing, I can tell you candidly, my girl, they don't. They hate it."

"Does it matter? I mean, one doesn't have to bother so much about husband-hunting to-day."

"Oh, no! Husbands don't matter at all, I suppose, to you advanced women. Any man will do, as long as he's got money——"

"Why do you say 'you' advanced women? I didn't say *I* felt that way about it. I don't *want* to go out to work——"

"There you go. Taking everything to yourself. I *know* you don't want to work. I know it's only because of the damned rotten position I'm in. You needn't keep on about it. I know I'm a failure. Thank your stars, Wimsey, that when you marry you'll be able to support your wife."

"George, you've no business to speak like that. I didn't mean that at all. You said——"

"I know what I said, but you took it all the wrong way. You always do. It's no good arguing with a woman. No—that's enough. For God's sake don't start all over again. I want a drink. Wimsey, you'll have a drink. Sheila, tell that girl of Mrs. Munns's to go round for half a bottle of Johnny Walker."

"Couldn't you get it yourself, dear? Mrs. Munns

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doesn't like us sending her girl. She was frightfully disagreeable last time."

"How can I go? I've taken my boots off. You do make such a fuss about nothing. What does it matter if old Mother Munns does kick up a shindy? She can't eat you."

"No," put in Wimsey. "But think of the corrupting influence of the jug-and-bottle department on Mrs. Munns's girl. I approve of Mrs. Munns. She has a motherly heart. I myself will be the St. George to rescue Mrs. Munns's girl from the Blue Dragon. Nothing shall stop me. No, don't bother to show me the way. I have a peculiar instinct about pubs. I can find one blindfold in a pea-souper with both hands tied behind me."

Mrs. Fentiman followed him to the front door.

"You mustn't mind what George says to-night. His tummy is feeling rotten and it makes him irritable. And it has been so worrying about this wretched money business."

"That's all right," said Wimsey. "I know exactly. You should see me when my tummy's upset. Took a young woman out the other night—lobster mayonnaise, meringues and sweet champagne—her choice—oh, lord!"

He made an eloquent grimace and departed in the direction of the public house.

When he returned, George Fentiman was standing on the doorstep.

"I say, Wimsey—I do apologize for being so bloody rude. It's my filthy temper. Rotten bad form. Sheila's gone up to bed in tears, poor kid. All my fault. If you knew how this damnable situation gets on my nerves—though I know there's no excuse . . ."

"'S quite all right," said Wimsey. "Cheer up. It'll all come out in the wash."

"My wife—" began George again.

"She's damned fine, old man. But what it is, you both want a holiday."

"We do, badly. Well, never say die. I'll see Murbles, as you suggest, Wimsey."

Bunter received his master that evening with a prim smirk of satisfaction.

"Had a good day, Bunter?"

"Very gratifying indeed, I thank your lordship. The prints on the walking-stick are indubitably identical with those on the sheet of paper you gave me."

"They are, are they? That's something. I'll look at 'em to-morrow, Bunter—I've had a tiring evening."

CHAPTER VIII

Lord Peter Leads Througb Strength

AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK THE NEXT MORNING, LORD Peter Wimsey, unobtrusively attired in a navy-blue suit and dark gray tie, suitable for a house of mourning, presented himself at the late Lady Dormer's house in Portman Square.

"Is Miss Dorland at home?"

"I will inquire, sir."

"Kindly give her my card and ask if she can spare me a few moments."

"Certainly, my lord. Will your lordship be good enough to take a seat?"

The man departed, leaving his lordship to cool his heels in a tall, forbidding room, with long crimson curtains, a dark red carpet and mahogany furniture of repellent appearance. After an interval of nearly fifteen minutes, he reappeared, bearing a note upon a salver. It was briefly worded:

"Miss Dorland presents her compliments to Lord Peter Wimsey, and regrets that she is not able to grant him an interview. If, as she supposes, Lord Peter has come to see her as the representative of

Major and Captain Fentiman, Miss Dorland requests that he will address himself to Mr. Pritchard, solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn, who is dealing, on her behalf, with all matters connected with the will of the late Lady Dormer."

"Dear me," said Wimsey to himself, "this looks almost like a snub. Very good for me, no doubt. Now I wonder—" He read the note again. "Murbles must have been rather talkative. I suppose he told Pritchard he was putting me on to it. Very indiscreet of Murbles and not like him."

The servant still stood mutely by, with an air of almost violently disassociating himself from all commentary.

"Thank you," said Wimsey. "Would you be good enough to say to Miss Dorland that I am greatly obliged to her for this information."

"Very good, my lord."

"And perhaps you would kindly call me a taxi."

"Certainly, my lord."

Wimsey entered the taxi with all the dignity he could summon, and was taken to Lincoln's Inn.

Mr. Pritchard was nearly as remote and snubbing in his manner as Miss Dorland. He kept Lord Peter waiting for twenty minutes and received him glacially, in the presence of a beady-eyed clerk.

"Oh, good morning," said Wimsey, affably. "Excuse my callin' on you like this. More regular to do it through Murbles, I s'pose—nice old boy,

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Murbles, isn't he? But I always believe in goin' as direct to the point as may be. Saves time, what?"

Mr. Pritchard bowed his head and asked how he might have the pleasure of serving his lordship.

"Well, it's about this Fentiman business. Survivorship and all that. Nearly said survival. Appropriate, what? You might call the old General a survival, eh?"

Mr. Pritchard waited without moving.

"I take it Murbles told you I was lookin' into the business, what? Tryin' to check up on the timetable and all that?"

Mr. Pritchard said neither yea nor nay, but placed his fingers together and sat patiently.

"It's a bit of a problem, you know. Mind if I smoke? Have one yourself?"

"I am obliged to you, I never smoke in business hours."

"Very proper. Much more impressive. Puts the wind up the clients, what? Well, now, I just thought I'd let you know that it's likely to be a close-ish thing. Very difficult to tell to a minute or so, don't you know. May turn out one way—may turn out the other—may turn completely bafflin' and all that. You get me?"

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes, absolutely. P'raps you'd like to hear how far I've got." And Wimsey recounted the history of his researches at the Bellona, in so far as the

evidence of the commissionaires and the hall-porter were concerned. He said nothing of his interview with Penberthy, nor of the odd circumstances connected with the unknown Oliver, confining himself to stressing the narrowness of the time-limits between which the General must be presumed to have arrived at the Club. Mr. Pritchard listened without comment. Then he said:

"And what, precisely, have you come to suggest?"

"Well, what I mean to say is, don't you know, wouldn't it be rather a good thing if the parties could be got to come to terms? Give and take, you see—split the doings and share the proceeds? After all, half a million's a goodish bit of money—quite enough for three people to live on in a quiet way, don't you think? And it would save an awful lot of trouble and—ahem—lawyers' fees and things."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pritchard. "I may say that I have been expecting this. A similar suggestion was made to me earlier by Mr. Murbles, and I then told him that my client preferred not to entertain the idea. You will permit me to add, Lord Peter, that the reiteration of this proposal by you, after your employment to investigate the facts of the case in the interests of the other party, has a highly suggestive appearance. You will excuse me, per-

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haps, if I warn you further that your whole course of conduct in this matter seems to me open to a very undesirable construction."

Wimsey flushed.

"You will perhaps permit *me*, Mr. Pritchard, to inform you that I am not 'employed' by anybody. I have been requested by Mr. Murbles to ascertain the facts. They are rather difficult to ascertain, but I have learned one very important thing from you this afternoon. I am obliged to you for your assistance. Good morning."

The beady-eyed clerk opened the door with immense politeness.

"Good morning," said Mr. Pritchard.

"Employed, indeed," muttered his lordship, wrathfully. "Undesirable construction. I'll construct him. That old brute knows something, and if he knows something, that shows there's something to be known. Perhaps he knows Oliver; I shouldn't wonder. Wish I'd thought to spring the name on him and see what he said. Too late now. Never mind, we'll get Oliver. Bunter didn't have any luck with those 'phone calls, apparently. I think I'd better get hold of Charles."

He turned into the nearest telephone-booth and gave the number of Scotland Yard. Presently an official voice replied, of which Whimsey inquired whether Detective-Inspector Parker was available. A series of clicks proclaimed that he was being put

through to Mr. Parker, who presently said:
"Hullo!"

"Hullo, Charles. This is Peter Wimsey. Look here, I want you to do something for me. It isn't a criminal job, but it's important. A man calling himself Oliver rang up a number in Mayfair at a little after nine on the night of November 10th. Do you think you could get that call traced for me?"

"Probably. What was the number?"

Wimsey gave it.

"Right you are, old chap. I'll have it looked up and let you know. How goes it? Anything doing?"

"Yes—rather a cozy little problem—nothing for you people—as far as I know, that is. Come round one evening and I'll tell you about it, unofficially."

"Thanks very much. Not for a day or two, though. We're run off our feet with this crate business."

"Oh, I know—the gentleman who was sent from Sheffield to Euston in a crate, disguised as York hams. Splendid. Work hard and you will be happy. No, thanks, my child, I don't want another twopenn'orth—I'm spending the money on sweets. Cheerio, Charles!"

The rest of the day Wimsey was obliged to pass in idleness, so far as the Bellona Club affair was concerned. On the following morning he was rung up by Parker.

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"I say—that 'phone-call you asked me to trace."

"Yes?"

"It was put through at 9.13 p.m. from a public call-box at Charing Cross Underground Station."

"Oh, hell!—the operator didn't happen to notice the bloke, I suppose?"

"There isn't an operator. It's one of those automatic boxes."

"Oh!—may the fellow who invented them fry in oil. Thanks frightfully, all the same. It gives us a line on the direction, anyhow."

"Sorry I couldn't do better for you. Cheerio!"

"Oh, cheer-damnably-ho!" retorted Wimsey, crossly, slamming the receiver down. "What is it, Bunter?"

"A district messenger, with a note, my lord."

"Ah,—from Mr. Murbles. Good. This may be something. Yes. Tell the boy to wait, there's an answer." He scribbled quickly. "Mr. Murbles has got an answer to that cabman advertisement, Bunter. There are two men turning up at six o'clock, and I'm arranging to go down and interview them."

"Very good, my lord."

"Let's hope that means we get a move on. Get me my hat and coat—I'm running round to Dover Street for a moment."

Robert Fentiman was there when Wimsey called, and welcomed him heartily.

"Any progress?"

"Possibly a little this evening. I've got a line on those cabmen. I just came round to ask if you could let me have a specimen of old Fentiman's fist."

"Certainly. Pick what you like. He hasn't left much about. Not exactly the pen of a ready writer. There are a few interesting notes of his early campaigns, but they're rather antiques by this time."

"I'd rather have something quite recent."

"There's a bundle of cancelled cheques here, if that would do."

"It would do particularly well—I want something with figures in it if possible. Many thanks. I'll take these."

"How on earth is his handwriting going to tell you when he pegged out?"

"That's my secret, dash it all! Have you been down to Gatti's?"

"Yes. They seem to know Oliver fairly well by sight, but that's all. He lunched there fairly often, say once a week or so, but they don't remember seeing him since the eleventh. Perhaps he's keeping under cover. However, I'll haunt the place a bit and see if he turns up."

"I wish you would. His call came from a public box, so that line of inquiry peters out."

"Oh, bad luck!"

"You've found no mention of him in any of the General's papers?"

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"Not a thing, and I've gone through every bit and scrap of writing in the place. By the way, have you seen George lately?"

"Night before last. Why?"

"He seems to me to be in rather a queer state. I went round last night and he complained of being spied on or something."

"Spied on?"

"Followed about. Watched. Like the blighters in the 'tec stories. Afraid all this business is getting on his nerves. I hope he doesn't go off his rocker or anything. It's bad enough for Sheila as it is. Decent little woman."

"Thoroughly decent," agreed Wimsey, "and very fond of him."

"Yes. Works like billy-oh to keep the home together and all that. Tell you the truth, I don't know how she puts up with George. Of course, married couples are always sparring and so on, but he ought to behave before other people. Dashed bad form, being rude to your wife in public. I'd like to give him a piece of my mind."

"He's in a beastly galling position," said Wimsey. "She's his wife and she's got to keep him, and I know he feels it very much."

"Do you think so? Seems to me he takes it rather as a matter of course. And whenever the poor little woman reminds him of it, he thinks she's rubbing it in."

"Naturally, he hates being reminded of it. And I've heard Mrs. Fentiman say one or two sharp things to him."

"I daresay. Trouble with George is, he can't control himself. He never could. A fellow ought to pull himself together and show a bit of gratitude. He seems to think that because Sheila has to work like a man she doesn't want the courtesy and—you know, tenderness and so on—that a woman ought to get."

"It always gives me the pip," said Wimsey, "to see how rude people are when they're married. I suppose it's inevitable. Women are funny. They don't seem to care half so much about a man's being honest and faithful—and I'm sure your brother's all that—as for their opening doors and saying thank-you. I've noticed it lots of times."

"A man ought to be just as courteous after marriage as he was before," declared Robert Fentiman, virtuously.

"So he ought, but he never is. Possibly there's some reason we don't know about," said Wimsey. "I've asked people, you know—my usual inquisitiveness—and they generally just grunt and say that their wives are sensible and take their affection for granted. But I don't believe women ever get sensible, not even through prolonged association with their husbands."

The two bachelors wagged their heads, solemnly.

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"Well, I think George is behaving like a sweep," said Robert, "but perhaps I'm hard on him. We never did get on very well. And anyhow, I don't pretend to understand women. Still, this persecution-mania, or whatever it is, is another thing. He ought to see a doctor."

"He certainly ought. We must keep an eye on him. If I see him at the Bellona I'll have a talk to him and try and get out of him what it's all about."

"You won't find him at the Bellona. He's avoided it since all this unpleasantness started. I think he's out hunting for jobs. He said something about one of those motor people in Great Portland Street wanting a salesman. He can handle a car pretty well, you know."

"I hope he gets it. Even if it doesn't pay very well it would do him a world of good to have something to do with himself. Well, I'd better be amblin' off. Many thanks, and let me know if you get hold of Oliver."

"Oh, rather!"

Wimsey considered a few moments on the doorstep, and then drove straight down to New Scotland Yard, where he was soon ushered in to Detective-Inspector Parker's office.

Parker, a square-built man in the late thirties, with the nondescript features which lend themselves so excellently to detective purposes, was possibly Lord Peter's most intimate—in some ways

his only intimate friend. The two men had worked out many cases together and each respected the other's qualities, though no two characters could have been more widely different. Wimsey was the Roland of the combination—quick, impulsive, careless and an artistic jack-of-all-trades. Parker was the Oliver—cautious, solid, painstaking, his mind a blank to art and literature and exercising itself, in spare moments, with Evangelical theology. He was the one person who was never irritated by Wimsey's mannerisms, and Wimsey repaid him with a genuine affection foreign to his usually detached nature.

"Well, how goes it?"

"Not so bad. I want you to do something for me."

"Not really?"

"Yes, really, blast your eyes. Did you ever know me when I didn't? I want you to get hold of one of your handwriting experts to tell me if these two fists are the same."

He put on the table, on the one hand the bundle of used cheques, and on the other the sheet of paper he had taken from the library at the Bellona Club.

Parker raised his eyebrows.

"That's a very pretty set of finger-prints you've been pulling up there. What is it? Forgery?"

"No nothing of that sort. I just want to know

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whether the same bloke who wrote these cheques made the notes too."

Parker rang a bell, and requested the attendance of Mr. Collins.

"Nice fat sums involved, from the looks of it," he went on, scanning the sheet of notes appreciatively. "£150,000 to R., £300,000 to G.—lucky G.—who's G? £20,000 here and £50,000 there. Who's your rich friend, Peter?"

"It's that long story I was going to tell you about when you'd finished your crate problem."

"Oh, is it? Then I'll make a point of solving the crate without delay. As a matter of fact, I'm rather expecting to hear something about it before long. That's why I'm here, dancing attendance on the 'phone. Oh, Collins, this is Lord Peter Wimsey, who wants very much to know whether these two handwritings are the same."

The expert took up the paper and the cheques and looked them over attentively.

"Not a doubt about it, I should say, unless the forgery has been astonishingly well done. Some of the figures, especially, are highly characteristic. The fives, for instance and the threes, and the fours, made all of a piece with the two little loops. It's a very old-fashioned handwriting, and made by a very old man, in not too-good health, especially this sheet of notes. Is that the old Fentiman who died the other day?"

"Well, it is, but you needn't shout about it. It's just a private matter."

"Just so. Well, I should say you need have no doubt about the authenticity of that bit of paper, if that's what you are thinking of."

"Thanks. That's precisely what I do want to know. I don't think there's the slightest question of forgery or anything. In fact, it was just whether we could look on these rough notes as a guide to his wishes. Nothing more."

"Oh, yes, if you rule out forgery, I'd answer for it any day that the same person wrote all these cheques and the notes."

"That's fine. That checks up the results of the finger-print test too. I don't mind telling you, Charles," he added, when Collins had departed, "that this case is getting damned interesting."

At this point the telephone rang, and Parker, after listening for some time, ejaculated "Good work!" and then, turning to Wimsey,

"That's our man. They've got him. Excuse me if I rush off. Between you and me, we've pulled this off rather well. It may mean rather a big thing for me. Sure we can't do anything else for you? Because I've got to get to Sheffield. See you to-morrow or next day."

He caught up his coat and hat and was gone. Wimsey made his own way out and sat for a long

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time at home, with Bunter's photographs of the Bellona Club before him, thinking.

At six o'clock, he presented himself at Mr. Murbles' Chambers in Staple Inn. The two taxi-drivers had already arrived and were seated, well on the edges of their chairs, politely taking old sherry with the solicitor.

"Ah!" said Mr. Murbles, "this is a gentleman who is interested in the inquiry we are making. Perhaps you would have the goodness to repeat to him what you have already told me. I have ascertained enough," he added, turning to Wimsey, "to feel sure that these are the right drivers, but I should like you to put any questions you wish yourself. This gentleman's name is Swain, and his story should come first, I think."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Swain, a stout man of the older type of driver, "you was wanting to know if anybody picked up an old gent in Portman Square the day before Armistice Day rahnd abaht the afternoon. Well, sir, I was goin' slow through the Square at 'arf-past four, or it might be a quarter to five on that 'ere day, when a footman comes out of a 'ouse—I couldn't say the number for certain, but it was on the east side of the Square as might be abaht the middle—and 'e makes a sign for me to stop. So I draws up, and presently a very old gent comes out. Very thin, 'e was, an' muffled up, but I see 'is legs and they was very thin and 'e

looked abaht a 'undred an' two by 'is face, and walked with a stick. 'E was upright, for such a very old gent, but 'e moved slow and rather feeble. An old milingtary gent, I thought 'e might be—'e 'ad that way of speakin', if you understand me, sir. So the footman tells me to drive 'im to a number in 'Arley Street."

"Do you remember it?"

Swain mentioned a number which Wimsey recognized as Penberthy's.

"So I drives 'im there. And 'e asks me to ring the bell for 'im, and when the young man comes to the door to ask if the doctor could please see General Fenton, or Fennimore or some such name, sir."

"Was it Fentiman, do you think?"

"Well, yes, it might 'ave been Fentiman. I think it was. So the young man comes back and says, yes, certingly, so I 'elps the old gent aht. Very faint, 'e seemed, and a very bad colour, sir, breathin' 'eavy and blue-like abaht the lips. Pore old b . . ., I thinks, beggin' yer pardon, sir, 'e won't be 'ere long, I thinks. So we 'elps him up the steps into the 'ouse and 'e gives me my fare and a shilling for myself, and that's the last I see of 'im, sir."

"That fits in all right with what Penberthy said," agreed Wimsey. "The General felt the strain of his interview with his sister and went straight round to see him. Right. Now how about this other part of the business?"

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"Well," said Mr. Murbles, "I think this gentleman, whose name is—let me see—Hinkins—yes. I think Mr. Hinkins picked up the General when he left Harley Street."

"Yes, sir," agreed the other driver, a smartish-looking man with a keen profile and a sharp eye. "A very old gentleman, like what we've 'eard described, took my taxi at this same number in 'Arley Street at 'alf past five. I remember the day very well, sir; November 10th it was, and I remember it because, after I done taking him where I'm telling you, my magneto started to give trouble, and I didn't 'ave the use of the 'bus on Armistice Day, which was a great loss to me, because that's a good day as a rule. Well, this old military gentleman gets in, with his stick and all, just as Swain says, only I didn't notice him looking particular ill, though I see he was pretty old. Maybe the doctor would have given him something to make him better."

"Very likely," said Mr. Murbles.

"Yes, sir. Well, he gets in, and he says, 'Take me to Dover Street,' he says, but if you was to ask me the number, sir, I'm afraid I don't rightly remember, because, you see, we never went there after all."

"Never went there?" cried Wimsey.

"No, sir. Just as we was comin' out into Cavendish Square, the old gentleman puts his head out

and says, 'Stop!' So I stops, and I see him wavin' his hand to a gentleman on the pavement. So this other one comes up, and they has a few words together and then the old——"

"One moment. What was this other man like?"

"Dark and thin, sir, and looked about forty. He had on a gray suit and overcoat and a soft hat, with a dark handkerchief round his throat. Oh, yes, and he had a small black mustache. So the old gentleman says, 'Cabman,' he says, just like that, 'cabman, go back up to Regent's Park and drive round till I tell you to stop.' So the other gentleman gets in with him, and I goes back and drives round the Park, quiet-like, because I guessed they wanted to 'ave a bit of a talk. So I goes twice round, and as we was going round the third time, the younger gentleman sticks 'is 'ed out and says, 'Put me down at Gloucester Gate.' So I puts him down there, and the old gentleman says, 'Good-bye, George, bear in mind what I have said.' So the gentleman says, 'I will, sir,' and I see him cross the road, like as if he might be going up Park Street."

Mr. Murbles and Wimsey exchanged glances.

"And then where did you go?"

"Then, sir, the fare says to me, 'Do you know the Bellona Club in Piccadilly?' he says. So I says, 'Yes, sir.'"

"The Bellona Club?"

"Yes, sir."

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"What time was that?"

"It might be getting on for half-past six, sir. I'd been driving very slow, as I tells you, sir. So I takes him to the Club, like he said, and in he goes, and that's the last I see of him, sir."

"Thanks very much," said Wimsey. "Did he seem to be at all upset or agitated when he was talking to the man he called George?"

"No, sir, I couldn't say that. But I thought he spoke a bit sharp-like. What you might call telling him off, sir."

"I see. What time did you get to the Bellona?"

"I should reckon it was about twenty minutes to seven, sir, or just a little bit more. There was a tidy bit of traffic about. Between twenty and ten to seven, as near as I can recollect."

"Excellent. Well, you have both been very helpful. That will be all to-day, but I'd like you to leave your names and addresses with Mr. Murbles, in case we might want some sort of a statement from either of you later on. And—er——"

A couple of Treasury notes crackled. Mr. Swain and Mr. Hinkins made suitable acknowledgment and departed, leaving their addresses behind them.

"So he went back to the Bellona Club. I wonder what for?"

"I think I know," said Wimsey. "He was accustomed to do any writing or business there, and I fancy he went back to put down some notes as to

what he meant to do with the money his sister was leaving him. Look at this sheet of paper, sir. That's the General's handwriting, as I've proved this afternoon, and those are his finger-prints. And the initials R and G probably stand for Robert and George, and these figures for the various sums he meant to leave them."

"That appears quite probable. Where did you find this?"

"In the end bay of the library at the Bellona, sir, tucked inside the blotting-paper."

"The writing is very weak and straggly."

"Yes—quite tails off, doesn't it. As though he had come over faint and couldn't go on. Or perhaps he was only tired. I must go down and find out if anybody saw him there that evening. But Oliver, curse him! is the man who knows. If only we could get hold of Oliver."

"We've had no answer to our third question in the advertisement. I've had letters from several drivers who took old gentlemen to the Bellona that morning, but none of them corresponds with the General. Some had check overcoats, and some had whiskers and some had bowler hats or beards—whereas the General was never seen without his silk hat and had, of course, his old-fashioned long military mustache."

"I wasn't hoping for very much from that. We might put in another ad. in case anybody picked

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him up from the Bellona on the evening or night of the 10th, but I've got a feeling that this infernal Oliver probably took him away in his own car. If all else fails, we'll have to get Scotland Yard on to Oliver."

"Make careful inquiries at the Club, Lord Peter. It now becomes more than possible that somebody saw Oliver there and noticed them leaving together."

"Of course. I'll go along there at once. And I'll put the advertisement in as well. I don't think we'll rope in the B.B.C. It is so confoundedly public."

"That," said Mr. Murbles, with a look of horror, "would be *most* undesirable."

Wimsey rose to go. The solicitor caught him at the door.

"Another thing we ought really to know," he said, "is what General Fentiman was saying to Captain George."

"I've not forgotten that," said Wimsey, a little uneasily. "We shall have—oh, yes—certainly—of course, we shall have to know that."

CHAPTER IX

Knave High

"LOOK HERE, WIMSEY," SAID CAPTAIN CULYER OF the Bellona Club, "aren't you ever going to get finished with this investigation or whatever it is? The members are complaining, really they are, and I can't blame them. They find your everlasting questions an intolerable nuisance, old boy, and I can't stop them from thinking there must be something behind it. People complain that they can't get attention from the porters or the waiters because you're everlastingly there chatting, and if you're not there, you're hanging round the bar, eaves-dropping. If this is your way of conducting an inquiry tactfully, I wish you'd do it tactlessly. It's becoming thoroughly unpleasant. And no sooner do you stop it, than the other fellow begins."

"What other fellow?"

"That nasty little skulking bloke who's always turning up at the service door and questioning the staff."

"I don't know anything about *him*," replied Wimsey, "I never heard of him. I'm sorry I'm being

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a bore and all that, though I swear I couldn't be worse than some of your other choice specimens in that line, but I've hit a snag. This business—quite in your ear, old bean—isn't as straightforward as it looks on the surface. That fellow Oliver whom I mentioned to you——”

“He's not known here, Wimsey.”

“No, but he may have been here.”

“If nobody saw him, he can't have been here.”

“Well, then, where did General Fentiman go to when he left. And when did he leave. That's what I want to know. Dash it all, Culyer, the old boy's a landmark. We know he came back here on the evening of the 10th—the driver brought him to the door, Rogers saw him come in and two members noticed him in the smoking room just before seven. I have a certain amount of evidence that he went into the library. And he can't have stayed long, because he had his outdoor things with him. Somebody *must* have seen him leave. It's ridiculous. The servants aren't all blind. I don't like to say it, Culyer, but I can't help thinking that somebody has been bribed to hold his tongue . . . Of course, I knew that would annoy you, but how can you account for it? Who's this fellow you say has been hangin' round the kitchen?”

“I came across him one morning when I'd been down to see about the wine. By the way, there's a case of Margaux come in which I'd like your

opinion on some day. The fellow was talking to Babcock, the wine steward, and I asked him pretty sharply what he wanted. He thanked me, and said he had come from the railway to enquire after a packing-case that had gone astray, but Babcock, who is a very decent fellow, told me afterwards that he had been working the pump-handle about old Fentiman, and I gathered he had been pretty liberal with his cash. I thought you were up to your tricks again."

"Is the fellow a sahib?"

"Good God, no. Looks like an attorney's clerk or something. A nasty little tout."

"Glad you told me. I shouldn't wonder if he's the snag I'm up against. Probably Oliver coverin' his tracks."

"Do you suspect this Oliver of something wrong?"

"Well—I rather think so. But I'm damned if I know quite what. I think he knows something about old Fentiman that we don't. And of course he knows how he spent the night, and that's what I'm after."

"What the devil does it matter how he spent the night? He can't have been very riotous, at his age."

"It might throw some light on the time he arrived in the morning, mightn't it?"

"Oh—Well, all I can say is, I hope to God you'll hurry up and finish with it. This Club's becoming

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a perfect bear-garden. I'd almost rather have the police in."

"Keep hopin'. You may get 'em yet."

"You don't mean that, seriously?"

"I'm never serious. That's what my friends dislike about me. Honestly, I'll try and make as little row as I can. But if Oliver is sending his minions to corrupt your staff and play old harry with my investigations, it's going to make it damned awkward. I wish you'd let me know if the fellow turns up again. I'd like to cast my eye over him."

"All right, I will. And do clear out now, there's a good fellow."

"I go," said Wimsey, "my tail well tucked down between my legs and a flea in each ear. Oh! by the way——"

"Well?" (in an exasperated tone).

"When did you last see George Fentiman?"

"Not for donkey's years. Not since it happened."

"I thought not. Oh, and by the way——"

"Yes?"

"Robert Fentiman was actually staying in the Club at the time, wasn't he?"

"Which time?"

"The time it happened, you ass."

"Yes, he was. But he's living at the old man's place now."

"I know, thanks. But I wondered whether—Where does he live when he isn't in town?"

"Out at Richmond, I think. In rooms, or something."

"Oh, does he? Thanks very much. Yes, I really will go. In fact, I've practically gone."

He went. He never stopped going till he came to Finsbury Park. George was out, and so, of course, was Mrs. Fentiman, but the charwoman said she had heard the Captain mention he was going down to Great Portland Street. Wimsey went in pursuit. A couple of hours spent lounging round show-rooms and talking to car-demonstrators, nearly all of whom were, in one manner or another, his dear old pals, resulted in the discovery that George Fentiman was being taken on by the Walmisley-Hubbard outfit for a few weeks to show what he could do.

"Oh, he'll do you all right," said Wimsey, "he's a damn fine driver. Oh, lord, yes! *He's* all right."

"He looks a bit nervy," said the particular dear old pal attached to the Walmisley-Hubbard show. "Wants bucking up, what? That reminds me. What about a quick one?"

Wimsey submitted to a mild quick one and then wandered back to look at a new type of clutch. He spun out this interesting interview till one of the Walmisley-Hubbard "shop 'buses" came in with Fentiman at the wheel.

"Hullo!" said Wimsey, "trying her out?"

"Yes. I've got the hang of her all right."

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"Think you could sell her?" asked the old pal.

"Oh, yes. Soon learn to show her off. She's a jolly decent 'bus."

"That's good. Well, I expect you're about ready for a quick one. How about it, Wimsey?"

They had a quick one together. After this, the dear old pal remembered that he must buzz off because he'd promised to hunt up a customer.

"You'll turn up to-morrow, then?" he said to George. "There's an old bird down at Malden wants to have a trial trip. I can't go, so you can have a shot at him. All right?"

"Perfectly."

"Righty-ho! I'll have the 'bus ready for you at eleven. Cheer-most-frightfully-ho! So long."

"Little sunbeam about the house, isn't he?" said Wimsey.

"Rather. Have another?"

"I was thinking, how about lunch? Come along with me if you have nothing better to do."

George accepted and put forward the names of one or two restaurants.

"No," said Wimsey, "I've got a fancy to go to Gatti's to-day, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, that will do splendidly. I've seen Murbles, by the bye, and he's prepared to deal with the MacStewart man. He thinks he can hold him off till it's all settled up—if it ever *is* settled."

"That's good," said Wimsey, rather absently.

"And I'm damned glad about this chance of a job," went on George. "If it turns out any good, it'll make things a lot easier—in more than one way."

Wimsey said heartily that he was sure it would, and then relapsed into a silence unusual with him, which lasted all the way to the Strand.

At Gatti's he left George in a corner while he went to have a chat with the head-waiter, emerging from the interview with a puzzled expression which aroused even George's curiosity, full as he was of his own concerns.

"What's up? Isn't there anything you can bear to eat?"

"It's all right. I was just wondering whether to have *moules marinières* or not."

"Good idea."

Wimsey's face cleared, and for some time they absorbed mussels from the shell with speechless, though not altogether silent, satisfaction.

"By the way," said Wimsey, suddenly, "you never told me that you had seen your grandfather the afternoon before he died."

George flushed. He was struggling with a particularly elastic mussel, firmly rooted to the shell, and could not answer for a moment.

"How on earth?—confound it all, Wimsey, are *you* behind this infernal watch that's being kept on me?"

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"Watch?"

"Yes, I said watch. I call it a damn rotten thing to do. I never thought for a moment you had anything to do with it."

"I haven't. Who's keeping a watch on you?"

"There's a fellow following me about. A spy. I'm always seeing him. I don't know whether he's a detective or what. He looks like a criminal. He came down in the 'bus with me from Finsbury Park this morning. He was after me all day yesterday. He's probably about now. I won't have it. If I catch sight of him again I shall knock his dirty little head off. Why should I be followed and spied on? I haven't done anything. And now *you* begin."

"I swear I've nothing to do with anybody following you about. Honestly, I haven't. I wouldn't employ a man, anyway, who'd let a bloke see that he was being followed. No. When I start huntin' you, I shall be as silent and stealthy as a gas-leak. What's this incompetent blood-hound like to look at?"

"Looks like a tout. Small, thin, with his hat pulled down over his eyes and an old rain-coat with the collar turned up. And a very blue chin."

"Sounds like a stage detective. He's a silly ass anyway."

"He gets on my nerves."

"Oh, all right. Next time you see him, punch his head."

"But what does he want?"

"How should I know? What have you been doing?"

"Nothing, of course. I tell you, Wimsey, I believe there's some sort of conspiracy going on to get me into trouble, or do away with me, or something. I can't stand it. It's simply damnable. Suppose this fellow starts hanging round the Walmisley-Hubbard place. Look nice, won't it, for their salesman to have a 'tec on his heels all the time? Just as I hoped things were coming right——"

"Bosh!" said Wimsey. "Don't let yourself get rattled. It's probably all imagination, or just a coincidence."

"It isn't. I wouldn't mind betting he's outside in the street now."

"Well, then, we'll settle his hash when we get outside. Give him in charge for annoying you. Look here, forget him for a bit. Tell me about the old General. How did he seem, that last time you saw him?"

"Oh, he seemed fit enough. Crusty, as usual."

"Crusty, was he? What about?"

"Private matters," said George, sullenly.

Wimsey cursed himself for having started his questions tactlessly. The only thing now was to retrieve the situation as far as possible.

"I'm not at all sure," he said, "that relations shouldn't all be painlessly put away after three-

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score and ten. Or at any rate segregated. Or have their tongues sterilized, so that they can't be poisonously interferin'."

"I wish they were," growled George. "The old man—damn it all, I know he was in the Crimea, but he's no idea what a real war's like. He thinks things can go on just as they did half a century ago. I daresay he never did behave as I do. Anyway, I know he never had to go to his wife for his pocket-money, let alone having the inside gassed out of him. Coming preaching to me—and I couldn't say anything, because he was so confoundedly old, you know."

"Very trying," murmured Wimsey, sympathetically.

"It's all so damned unfair," said George. "Do you know," he burst out, the sense of grievance suddenly overpowering his wounded vanity, "the old devil actually threatened to cut me out of the miserable little bit of money he had to leave me if I didn't 'reform my domestic behaviour.' That's the way he talked. Just as if I was carrying on with another woman or something. I know I did have an awful row with Sheila one day, but of course I didn't mean half I said. She knows that, but the old man took it all seriously."

"Half a moment," broke in Wimsey, "did he say all this to you in the taxi that day?"

"Yes, he did. A long lecture, all about the purity

and courage of a good woman, driving round and round Regent's Park. I had to promise to turn over a new leaf and all that. Like being back at one's prep. school."

"But didn't he mention anything about the money Lady Dormer was leaving to him?"

"Not a word. I don't suppose he knew about it."

"I think he did. He'd just come from seeing her, you know, and I've a very good idea she explained matters to him then."

"Did she? Well, that rather explains it. I thought he was being very pompous and stiff about it. He said what a responsibility money was, you know, and how he would like to feel that anything he left to me was being properly used and all that. And he rubbed it in about my not having been able to make good for myself—that was what got my goat—and about Sheila. Said I ought to appreciate a good woman's love more, my boy, and cherish her and so on. As if I needed him to tell me that. But of course, if he knew he was in the running for this half-million, it makes rather a difference. By jove, yes! I expect he would feel a bit anxious at the idea of leaving it all to a fellow he looked on as a waster."

"I wonder he didn't mention it."

"You didn't know grandfather. I bet he was thinking over in his mind whether it wouldn't be better to give my share to Sheila, and he was sound-

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ing me, to see what sort of disposition I'd got. The old fox! Well, I did my best to put myself in a good light, of course, because just at the moment I didn't want to lose my chance of his two thousand. But I don't think he found me satisfactory. I say," went on George, with rather a sheepish laugh, "perhaps it's just as well he popped off when he did. He might have cut me off with a shilling, eh?"

"Your brother would have seen you through in any case."

"I suppose he would. Robert's quite a decent sort, really, though he does get on one's nerves so."

"Does he?"

"He's so thick-skinned; the regular unimaginative Briton. I believe Robert would cheerfully go through another five years of war and think it all a very good rag. Robert was proverbial, you know, for never turning a hair. I remember Robert, at that ghastly hole at Carency, where the whole ground was rotten with corpses—ugh!—potting those swollen great rats for a penny a time, and laughing at them. Rats. Alive and putrid with what they'd been feeding on. Oh, yes. Robert was thought a damn good soldier."

"Very fortunate for him," said Wimsey.

"Yes. He's the same sort as grandfather. They liked each other. Still, grandfather was very decent about me. A beast, as the schoolboy said, but a just beast. And Sheila was a great favourite of his."

"Nobody could help liking her," said Wimsey, politely.

Lunch ended on a more cheerful note than it had begun. As they came out into the street, however, George Fentiman glanced round uneasily. A small man in a buttoned-up overcoat and with a soft hat pulled down over his eyes, was gazing into the window of a shop near at hand.

George strode up to him.

"Look here, you!" he said. "What the devil do you mean by following me about? You clear off, d'you hear?"

"I think you are mistaken, sir," said the man, quietly enough. "I have never seen you before."

"Haven't you, by jove? Well, *I've* seen *you* hanging about, and if you do it any more, I'll give you something to remember me by. D'you hear?"

"Hullo!" said Wimsey, who had stopped to speak to the commissionaire, "what's up?—Here, you, wait a moment!"

But at sight of Wimsey, the man had slipped like an eel among the roaring Strand traffic, and was lost to view.

George Fentiman turned to his companion triumphantly.

"Did you see that? That lousy little beggar! Made off like a shot when I threatened him. That's the fellow who's been dogging me about for three days."

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"I'm sorry," said Wimsey, "but it was not your prowess, Fentiman. It was my awful aspect that drove him away. What is it about me? Have I a front like Jove to threaten and command? Or am I wearing a repulsive tie?"

"He's gone, anyway."

"I wish I'd had a better squint at him. Because I've got a sort of idea that I've seen those lovely features before, and not so long ago, either. Was this the face that launched a thousand ships? No, I don't think it was that."

"All I can say is," said George, "that if I see him again, I'll put such a face on him that his mother won't know him."

"Don't do that. You might destroy a clue. I—wait a minute—I've got an idea. I believe it must be the same man who's been haunting the Bellona and asking questions. Oh, hades! and we've let him go. And I'd put him down in my mind as Oliver's minion. If ever you see him again, Fentiman, freeze on to him like grim death. I want to talk to him."

CHAPTER X

Lord Peter Forces A Card

"HULLO!"

"Is that you, Wimsey? Hullo! I say, is that Lord Peter Wimsey. Hullo! I must speak to Lord Peter Wimsey. Hullo!"

"All right. I've said hullo. Who're you? And what's the excitement?"

"It's me. Major Fentiman. I say—is that Wimsey?"

"Yes. Wimsey speaking. What's up?"

"I can't hear you."

"Of course you can't if you keep on shouting. This is Wimsey. Good morning. Stand three inches from the mouthpiece and speak in an ordinary voice. Do not say hullo! To recall the operator, depress the receiver *gently* two or three times."

"Oh, shut up! don't be an ass. I've see Oliver."

"Have you, where?"

"Getting into a train at Charing Cross."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No—it's maddening. I was just getting my ticket when I saw him passing the barrier. I tore down after him. Some people got in my way, curse

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them. There was a Circle train standing at the platform. He bolted in and they clanged the doors. I rushed on, waving and shouting, but the train went out. I cursed like anything."

"I bet you did. How very sickening."

"Yes, wasn't it? I took the next train——"

"What for?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought I might spot him on a platform somewhere."

"What a hope! You didn't think to ask where he'd booked for?"

"No. Besides, he probably got the ticket from an automatic."

"Probably. Well, it can't be helped, that's all. He'll probably turn up again. You're sure it was he?"

"Oh, dear, yes. I couldn't be mistaken. I'd know him anywhere. I thought I'd just let you know."

"Thanks awfully. It encourages me extremely. Charing Cross seems to be a haunt of his. He 'phoned from there on the evening of the tenth, you know."

"So he did."

"I'll tell you what we'd better do, Fentiman. The thing is getting rather serious. I propose that you should go and keep an eye on Charing Cross station. I'll get hold of a detective——"

"A police detective?"

"Not necessarily. A private one would do. You

and he can go along and keep watch on the station for, say a week. You must describe Oliver to the detective as best you can, and you can watch turn and turn about."

"Hang it all, Wimsey—it'll take a lot of time. I've gone back to my rooms at Richmond. And besides, I've got my own duties to do."

"Yes, well, while you're on duty the detective must keep watch."

"It's a dreadful grind, Wimsey." Fentiman's voice sounded dissatisfied.

"It's half a million of money. Of course, if you're not keen——"

"I *am* keen. But I don't believe anything will come of it."

"Probably not; but it's worth trying. And in the meantime, I'll have another watch kept at Gatti's."

"At Gatti's?"

"Yes. They know him there. I'll send a man down——"

"But he never comes there now."

"Oh, but he may come again. There's no reason why he shouldn't. We know now that he's in town, and not gone out of the country or anything. I'll tell the management that he's wanted for an urgent business matter, so as not to make unpleasantness."

"They won't like it."

"Then they'll have to lump it."

"Well, all right. But, look here—I'll do Gatti's."

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"That won't do. We want you to identify him at Charing Cross. The waiter or somebody can do the identifying at Gatti's. You say they know him."

"Yes, of course they do. But——"

"But what?—By the way, which waiter is it you spoke to. I had a talk with the head man there yesterday, and he didn't seem to know anything about it."

"No—it wasn't the head waiter. One of the others. The plump, dark one."

"All right. I'll find the right one. Now, will you see to the Charing Cross end?"

"Of course—if you really think it's any good."

"Yes, I do. Right you are. I'll get hold of the 'tec and send him along to you, and you can arrange with him."

"Very well."

"Cheerio!"

Lord Peter rang off and sat for a few moments, grinning to himself. Then he turned to Bunter.

"I don't often prophesy, Bunter, but I'm going to do it now. Your fortune told by hand or cards. Beware of the dark stranger. That sort of thing."

"Indeed, my lord?"

"Cross the gipsy's palm with silver. I see Mr. Oliver. I see him taking a journey in which he will cross water. I see trouble. I see the ace of spaces—upside-down, Bunter."

"And what then, my lord?"

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"Nothing. I look into the future and I see a blank. The gipsy has spoken."

"I will bear it in mind, my lord."

"Do. If my prediction is not fulfilled, I will give you a new camera. And now I'm going round to see that fellow who calls himself Sleuths Incorporated, and get him to put a good man on to keep watch at Charing Cross. And after that, I'm going down to Chelsea and I don't quite know when I shall be back. You'd better take the afternoon off. Put me out some sandwiches or something, and don't wait up if I'm late."

Wimsey disposed quickly of his business with Sleuths Incorporated, and then made his way to a pleasant little studio overlooking the river at Chelsea. The door, which bore a neat label "Miss Marjorie Phelps," was opened by a pleasant-looking young woman with curly hair and a blue overall heavily smudged with clay.

"Lord Peter! How nice of you. Do come in."

"Shan't I be in the way?"

"Not a scrap. You don't mind if I go on working."

"Rather not."

"You could put the kettle on and find some food if you liked to be really helpful. I just want to finish up this figure."

"That's fine. I took the liberty of bringing a pot of Hybla honey with me."

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"What sweet ideas you have! I really think you are one of the nicest people I know. You don't talk rubbish about art, and you don't want your hand held, and your mind always turns on eating and drinking."

"Don't speak too soon. I don't want my hand held, but I did come here with an object."

"Very sensible of you. Most people come without any."

"And stay interminably."

"They do."

Miss Phelps cocked her head on one side and looked critically at the little dancing lady she was modeling. She had made a line of her own in pottery figurines, which sold well and were worth the money.

"That's rather attractive," said Wimsey.

"Rather pretty-pretty. But it's a special order, and one can't afford to be particular. I've done a Christmas present for you, by the way. You'd better have a look at it, and if you think it offensive we'll smash it together. It's in that cupboard."

Wimsey opened the cupboard and extracted a little figure about nine inches high. It represented a young man in a flowing dressing-gown, absorbed in the study of a huge volume held on his knee. The portrait was life-like. He chuckled.

"It's damned good, Marjorie. A very fine bit of modeling. I'd love to have it. You aren't multiply-

ing it too often, I hope? I mean, it won't be on sale at Selfridges?"

"I'll spare you that. I thought of giving one to your mother."

"That'll please her no end. Thanks ever so. I shall look forward to Christmas, for once. Shall I make some toast?"

"Rather!"

Wimsey squatted happily down before the gas-fire, while the modeler went on with her work. Tea and figurine were ready almost at the same moment, and Miss Phelps, flinging off her overall, threw herself luxuriously into a battered arm-chair by the hearth.

"And what can I do for you?"

"You can tell me all you know about Miss Ann Dorland."

"Ann Dorland? Great heavens! You haven't fallen for Ann Dorland, have you? I've heard she's coming into a lot of money."

"You have a perfectly disgusting mind, Miss Phelps. Have some more toast. Excuse me licking my fingers. I have not fallen for the lady. If I had, I'd manage my affairs without assistance. I haven't even seen her. What's she like?"

"To look at?"

"Among other things."

"Well, she's rather plain. She has dark, straight hair, cut in a bang across the forehead and bobbed

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—like a Flemish page. Her forehead is broad and she has a square sort of face and a straight nose—quite good. Also, her eyes are good—gray, with nice heavy eyebrows, not fashionable a bit. But she has a bad skin and rather sticky-out teeth. And she's dumpy."

"She's a painter, isn't she?"

"M'm—well! she paints."

"I see. A well-off amateur with a studio."

"Yes. I will say that old Lady Dormer was very decent to her. Ann Dorland, you know, is some sort of far-away distant cousin on the female side of the Fentiman family, and when Lady Dormer first got to hear of her she was an orphan and incredibly poverty-stricken. The old lady liked to have a bit of young life about the house, so she took charge of her, and the wonderful thing is that she didn't try to monopolize her. She let her have a big place for a studio and bring in any friends she liked and go about as she chose—in reason, of course."

"Lady Dormer suffered a good deal from oppressive relations in her own youth," said Wimsey.

"I know, but most old people seem to forget that. I'm sure Lady Dormer had time enough. She must have been rather unusual. Mind you, I didn't know her very well, and I don't really know a great deal about Ann Dorland. I've been there, of course. She gave parties—rather incompetently. And she

comes round to some of our studios from time to time. But she isn't really one of us."

"Probably one has to be really poor and hard-working to be that."

"No. You, for instance, fit in quite well on the rare occasions when we have the pleasure. And it doesn't matter not being able to paint. Look at Bobby Hobart and his ghastly daubs—he's a perfect dear and everybody loves him. I think Ann Dorland must have a complex of some kind. Complexes explain so much, like the blessed word hippopotamus."

Wimsey helped himself lavishly to honey and looked receptive.

"I think really," went on Miss Phelps, "that Ann ought to have been something in the City. She has brains, you know. She'd run anything awfully well. But she isn't creative. And then, of course, so many of our little lot seem to be running love-affairs. And a continual atmosphere of hectic passion is very trying if you haven't got any of your own."

"Has Miss Dorland a mind above hectic passion?"

"Well, no. I daresay she would quite have liked—but nothing ever came of it. Why are you interested in having Ann Dorland analyzed?"

"I'll tell you some day. It isn't just vulgar curiosity."

"No, you're very decent as a rule, or I wouldn't

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be telling you all this. I think, really, Ann has a sort of fixed idea that she couldn't ever possibly attract any one, and so she's either sentimental and tiresome, or rude and snubbing, and our crowd does hate sentimentality and simply can't bear to be snubbed. Ann's rather pathetic, really. As a matter of fact, I think she's gone off art a bit. Last time I heard about her, she had been telling some one she was going in for social service, or sick-nursing, or something of that kind. I think it's very sensible. She'd probably get along much better with the people who do that sort of thing. They're so much more solid and polite."

"I see. Look here, suppose I ever wanted to run across Miss Dorland accidentally on purpose—where should I be likely to find her?"

"You *do* seem thrilled about her! I think I should try the Rushworths. They go in rather for science and improving the submerged tenth and things like that. Of course, I suppose Ann's in mourning now, but I don't think that would necessarily keep her away from the Rushworths'. Their gatherings aren't precisely frivolous."

"Thanks very much. You're a mine of valuable information. And, for a woman, you don't ask many questions."

"Thank you for those few kind words, Lord Peter."

"I am now free to devote my invaluable atten-

tion to *your* concerns. What is the news? And who is in love with whom?"

"Oh, life is a perfect desert. Nobody is in love with me, and the Schlitzers have had a worse row than usual and separated."

"No!"

"Yes. Only, owing to financial considerations, they've got to go on sharing the same studio—you know, that big room over the mews. It must be very awkward having to eat and sleep and work in the same room with somebody you're being separated from. They don't even speak, and it's very awkward when you call on one of them and the other has to pretend not to be able to see or hear you."

"I shouldn't think one could keep it up under those circumstances."

"It's difficult. I'd have had Olga here, only she is so dreadfully bad-tempered. Besides, neither of them will give up the studio to the other."

"I see. But isn't there any third party in the case?"

"Yes—Ulric Fiennes, the sculptor, you know. But he can't have her at his place because his wife's there, and he's really dependent on his wife, because his sculpting doesn't pay. And besides, he's at work on that colossal group for the Exhibition and he can't move it; it weighs about twenty tons. And if he went off and took Olga away, his wife would lock

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him out of the place. It's very inconvenient being a sculptor. It's like playing the double-bass; one's so handicapped by one's baggage."

"True. Whereas, when you run away with me, we'll be able to put all the pottery shepherds and shepherdesses in a handbag."

"Of course. What fun it will be. Where shall we run to?"

"How about starting to-night and getting as far as Oddenino's and going on to a show—if you're not doing anything?"

"You are a loveable man, and I shall call you Peter. Shall we see 'Betwixt and Between?' "

"The thing they had such a job to get past the censor? Yes, if you like. Is it particularly obscene?"

"No, epicene, I fancy."

"Oh, I see. Well, I'm quite agreeable. Only I warn you that I shall make a point of asking you the meaning of all the risky bits in a very audible voice."

"That's your idea of amusement, is it?"

"Yes. It does make them so wild. People say 'Hush!' and giggle, and if I'm lucky I end up with a gorgeous row in the bar."

"Then I won't risk it. No. I'll tell you what I'd really love. We'll go and see 'George Barnwell' at the Elephant and have a fish-and-chips supper afterwards."

This was agreed upon, and was voted in retro-

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spect a most profitable evening. It finished up with grilled kippers at a friend's studio in the early hours. Lord Peter returned home to find a note upon the hall-table.

"My lord,

The person from Sleuths Incorporated rang up to-day that he was inclined to acquiesce in your lordship's opinion, but that he was keeping his eye upon the party and would report further to-morrow. The sandwiches are on the dining-room table, if your lordship should require refreshment.

"Yours obediently,

"M. BUNTER."

"Cross the gipsy's palm with silver," said his lordship, happily, and rolled into bed.

CHAPTER XI

Lord Peter Clears Trumps

"SLEUTH'S INCORPORATED'S" REPORT, WHEN IT came, might be summed up as "Nothing doing and Major Fentiman convinced that there never will be anything doing; opinion shared by Sleuths Incorporated." Lord Peter's reply was: "Keep on watching and something will happen before the week is out."

His lordship was justified. On the fourth evening, "Sleuths Incorporated" reported again by telephone. The particular sleuth in charge of the case had been duly relieved by Major Fentiman at 6 P.M. and had gone to get his dinner. On returning to his post an hour later, he had been presented with a note left for him with the ticket-collector at the stair-head. It ran: "Just seen Oliver getting into taxi. Am following. Will communicate to refreshment-room. Fentiman." The sleuth had perforce to return to the refreshment room and hang about waiting for a further message. "But all the while, my lord, the second man I put on as instructed by you, my lord, was a-following the

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Major unbeknownst." Presently a call was put through from Waterloo. "Oliver is on the Southampton train. I am following." The sleuth hurried down to Waterloo, found the train gone and followed on by the next. At Southampton he made inquiries and learned that a gentleman answering to Fentiman's description had made a violent disturbance as the Havre boat was just starting, and had been summarily ejected at the instance of an elderly man whom he appeared to have annoyed or attacked in some way. Further investigation among the Port authorities made it clear that Fentiman had followed this person down, made himself offensive on the train and been warned off by the guard, collared his prey again on the gangway and tried to prevent him from going aboard. The gentleman had produced his passport and pièces d'identité, showing him to be a retired manufacturer of the name of Postlethwaite, living at Kew. Fentiman had insisted that he was, on the contrary, a man called Oliver, address and circumstances unknown, whose testimony was wanted in some family matter. As Fentiman was unprovided with a passport and appeared to have no official authority for stopping and questioning travelers, and as his story seemed vague and his manner agitated, the local police had decided to detain Fentiman. Postlethwaite was allowed to proceed on his way, after leaving his address in England and his destination,

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which, as he contended, and as he produced papers and correspondence to prove, was Venice.

The sleuth went round to the police-station, where he found Fentiman, apoplectic with fury, threatening proceedings for false imprisonment. He was able to get him released, however, on bearing witness to Fentiman's identity and good faith, and after persuading him to give a promise to keep the peace. He had then reminded Fentiman that private persons were not entitled to assault or arrest peaceable people against whom no charge could be made, pointing out to him that his proper course, when Oliver denied being Oliver, would have been to follow on quietly and keep a watch on him, while communicating with Wimsey or Mr. Murbles or Sleuths Incorporated. He added that he was himself now waiting at Southampton for further instructions from Lord Peter. Should he follow to Venice, or send his subordinate, or should he return to London? In view of the frank behaviour of Mr. Postlethwaite, it seemed probable that a genuine mistake had been made as to identity, but Fentiman insisted that he was not mistaken.

Lord Peter, holding the trunk line, considered for a moment. Then he laughed.

"Where is Major Fentiman?" he asked.

"Returning to town, my lord. I have represented to him that I have now all the necessary information to go upon, and that his presence in Venice

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would only hamper my movements, now that he has made himself known to the party."

"Quite so. Well, I think you might as well send your man on to Venice, just in case it's a true bill. And listen" . . . He gave some further instructions, ending with: "And ask Major Fentiman to come and see me as soon as he arrives."

"Certainly, my lord."

"What price the gipsy's warning now?" said Lord Peter, as he communicated this piece of intelligence to Bunter.

Major Fentiman came round to the flat that afternoon, in a whirl of apology and indignation.

"I'm sorry, old man. It was damned stupid of me, but I lost my temper. To hear that fellow calmly denying that he had ever seen me or poor old grandfather, and coming out with his bits of evidence so pat, put my bristles up. Of course, I see now that I made a mistake. I quite realize that I ought to have followed him up quietly. But how was I to know that he wouldn't answer to his name?"

"But you ought to have guessed when he didn't, that either you had made a mistake or that he had some very good motive for trying to get away," said Wimsey.

"I wasn't accusing him of anything."

"Of course not, but he seems to have thought you were."

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"But why?—I mean, when I first spoke to him, I just said, 'Mr. Oliver, I think?' And he said, 'You are mistaken.' And I said, 'Surely not. My name's Fentiman, and you knew my grandfather, old General Fentiman.' And he said he hadn't the pleasure. So I explained that we wanted to know where the old boy had spent the night before he died, and he looked at me as if I was a lunatic. That annoyed me, and I said I knew he was Oliver, and then he complained to the guard. And when I saw him just trying to hop off like that, without giving us any help, and when I thought about that half-million, it made me so mad I just collared him. 'Oh, no, you don't,' I said—and that was how the fun began, don't you see."

"I see perfectly," said Wimsey. "But don't *you* see, that if he really *is* Oliver and has gone off in that elaborate manner, with false passports and everything, he must have something important to conceal."

Fentiman's jaw dropped.

"You don't mean—you don't mean there's anything funny about the death? Oh! surely not."

"There must be something funny about Oliver, anyway, mustn't there? On your own showing?"

"Well, if you look at it that way, I suppose there must. I tell you what, he's probably got into some bother or other and is clearing out. Debt, or a

woman, or something. Of course that must be it. And I was beastly inconvenient popping up like that. So he pushed me off. I see it all now. Well, in that case, we'd better let him rip. We can't get him back, and I daresay he won't be able to tell us anything after all."

"That's possible, of course. But when you bear in mind that he seems to have disappeared from Gatti's, where you used to see him, almost immediately after the General's death, doesn't it look rather as though he was afraid of being connected up with that particular incident?"

Fentiman wriggled uncomfortably.

"Oh, but, hang it all! What could he have to do with the old man's death?"

"I don't know. But I think we might try to find out."

"How?"

"Well, we might apply for an exhumation order."

"Dig him up!" cried Fentiman, scandalized.

"Yes. There was no post-mortem, you know."

"No, but Penberthy knew all about it and gave the certificate."

"Yes; but at that time there was no reason to suppose that anything was wrong."

"And there isn't now."

"There are a number of peculiar circumstances, to say the least."

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"There's only Oliver—and I may have been mistaken about him."

"But I thought you were so sure?"

"So I was. But—this is preposterous, Wimsey! Besides, think what a scandal it would make!"

"Why should it? You are the executor. You can make a private application and the whole thing can be done quite privately."

"Yes, but surely the Home Office would never consent, on such flimsy grounds."

"I'll see that they do. They'll know I wouldn't be keen on anything flimsy. Little bits of fluff were never in my line."

"Oh, do be serious. What reason can we give?"

"Quite apart from Oliver, we can give a very good one. We can say that we want to examine the contents of the viscera to see how soon the General died after taking his last meal. That might be of great assistance in solving the question of the survivorship. And the law, generally speaking, is nuts on what they call the orderly devolution of property."

"Hold on! D'you mean to say you can tell when a bloke died just by looking inside his tummy?"

"Not exactly, of course. But one might get an idea. If we found, that is, that he'd only that moment swallowed his brekker, it would show that he'd died not very long after arriving at the Club."

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"Good lord!—that would be a poor look-out for me."

"It might be the other way, you know."

"I don't like it, Wimsey. It's very unpleasant. I wish to goodness we could compromise on it."

"But the lady in the case won't compromise. You know that. We've got to get at the facts somehow. I shall certainly get Murbles to suggest the exhumation to Pritchard."

"Oh, lord! What'll *he* do?"

"Pritchard? If he's an honest man and his client's an honest woman, they'll support the application. If they don't, I shall fancy they've something to conceal."

"I wouldn't put it past them. They're a low-down lot. But they can't do anything without my consent, can they?"

"Not exactly—at least, not without a lot of trouble and publicity. But if *you're* an honest man, you'll give your consent. *You've* nothing to conceal, I suppose?"

"Of course not. Still, it seems rather——"

"They suspect us already of some kind of dirty work," persisted Wimsey. "That brute Pritchard as good as told me so. I'm expecting every day to hear that he has suggested exhumation off his own bat. I'd rather we got in first with it."

"If that's the case, I suppose we must do it. But I can't believe it'll do a bit of good, and it's sure to

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get round and make an upheaval. Isn't there some other way—you're so darned clever——"

"Look here, Fentiman. Do you want to get at the facts? Or are you out to collar the cash by hook or by crook? You may as well tell me frankly which it is."

"Of course I want to get at the facts."

"Very well; I've told you the next step to take."

"Damn it all," said Fentiman, discontentedly; "I suppose it'll have to be done, then. But I don't know whom to apply to or how to do it."

"Sit down, then, and I'll dictate the letter for you."

From this there was no escape, and Robert Fentiman did as he was told, grumbling.

"There's George. I ought to consult him."

"It doesn't concern George, except indirectly. That's right. Now write to Murbles, telling him what you're doing and instructing him to let the other party know."

"Oughtn't we to consult about the whole thing with Murbles first?"

"I've already consulted Murbles, and he agrees it's the thing to do."

"These fellows would agree to anything that means fees and trouble."

"Just so. Still, solicitors are necessary evils. Is that finished?"

"Yes."

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"Give the letters to me; I'll see they're posted. Now you needn't worry any more about it. Murbles and I will see to it all, and the detective-wallah is looking after Oliver all right, so you can run away and play."

"You——"

"I'm sure you're going to say how good it is of me to take all this trouble. Delighted, I'm sure. It's of no consequence. A pleasure, in fact. Have a drink."

The disconcerted major refused the drink rather shortly and prepared to depart.

"You mustn't think I'm not grateful, Wimsey, and all that. But it is rather unseemly."

"With all your experience," said Wimsey, "you oughtn't to be so sensitive about corpses. We've seen many things much unseemlier than a nice, quiet little resurrection in a respectable cemetery."

"Oh, I don't care twopence about the corpse," retorted the Major, "but the thing doesn't look well. That's all."

"Think of the money," grinned Wimsey, shutting the door of the flat upon him.

He returned to the library, balancing the two letters in his hand. "There's many a man now walking the streets of London," said he, "through not clearing trumps. Take these letters to the post, Bunter. And Mr. Parker will be dining here with me this evening. We will have a *perdrix aux choux*

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and a savoury to follow, and you can bring up two bottles of the *Chambertin*."

"Very good, my lord."

Wimsey's next proceeding was to write a little confidential note to an official whom he knew very well at the Home Office. This done, he returned to the telephone and asked for Penberthy's number.

"That you, Penberthy? . . . Wimsey speaking. . . . Look here, old man, you know that Fentiman business? . . . Yes, well, we're applying for an exhumation."

"For a *what*?"

"An exhumation. Nothing to do with your certificate. We know *that's* all right. It's just by way of getting a bit more information about when the beggar died."

He outlined his suggestion.

"Think there's something in it?"

"There might be, of course."

"Glad to hear you say that. I'm a layman in these matters, but it occurred to me as a good idea."

"Very ingenious."

"I always was a bright lad. You'll have to be present, of course."

"Am I to do the autopsy?"

"If you like. Lubbock will do the analysis."

"Analysis of what?"

"Contents of the doings. Whether he had kidneys on toast or eggs and bacon and all that."

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"Oh, I see. I doubt if you'll get much from that, after all this time."

"Possibly not, but Lubbock had better have a squint at it."

"Yes, certainly. As I gave the certificate, it's better that my findings should be checked by somebody."

"Exactly. I knew you'd feel that way. You quite understand about it?"

"Perfectly. Of course, if we'd had any idea there was going to be all this uncertainty, I'd have made a post-mortem at the time."

"Naturally you would. Well, it can't be helped. All in the day's work. I'll let you know when it's to be. I suppose the Home Office will send somebody along. I thought I ought just to let you know about it."

"Very good of you. Yes. I'm glad to know. Hope nothing unpleasant will come out."

"Thinking of your certificate?"

"Oh, well—no—I'm not worrying much about that. Though you never know, of course. I was thinking of that rigour, you know. Seen Captain Fentiman lately?"

"Yes. I didn't mention—"

"No. Better not, unless it becomes absolutely necessary. Well, I'll hear from you later, then?"

"That's the idea. Good-bye."

That day was a day of incident.

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About four o'clock a messenger arrived, panting, from Mr. Murbles. (Mr. Murbles refused to have his chambers desecrated by a telephone.) Mr. Murbles' compliments, and would Lord Peter be good enough to read this note and let Mr. Murbles have an immediate answer.

The note ran:

"Dear Lord Peter,

In re Fentiman deceased. Mr. Pritchard has called. He informs me that his client is now willing to compromise on a division of the money if the Court will permit. Before I consult my client, Major Fentiman, I should be greatly obliged by your opinion as to how the investigation stands at present.

Yours faithfully,
Jno. Murbles."

Lord Peter replied as follows:

"Dear Mr. Murbles,

Re Fentiman deceased. Too late to compromise now, unless you are willing to be party to a fraud. I warned you, you know. Robert has applied for exhumation. Can you dine with me at 8?

P. W."

Having sent this off, his lordship rang for Bunter.

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"Bunter, as you know, I seldom drink champagne. But I am inclined to do so now. Bring a glass for yourself as well."

The cork popped merrily, and Lord Peter rose to his feet.

"Bunter," said he, "I give you a toast. The triumph of Instinct over Reason!"

CHAPTER XII

Lord Peter Turns A Trick

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR PARKER CAME TO DINNER encircled in a comfortable little halo of glory. The Crate Mystery had turned out well and the Chief Commissioner had used expressions suggestive of promotion in the immediate future. Parker did justice to his meal and, when the party had adjourned to the library, gave his attention to Lord Peter's account of the Bellona affair with the cheerful appreciation of a connoisseur sampling a vintage port. Mr. Murbles, on the other hand, grew more and more depressed as the story was unfolded.

"And what do you think of it?" inquired Wimsey.

Parker opened his mouth to reply, but Mr. Murbles was beforehand with him.

"This Oliver appears to be a very elusive person," said he.

"Isn't he?" agreed Wimsey, dryly. "Almost as elusive as the famous Mrs. Harris. Would it altogether surprise you to learn that when I asked a few discreet questions at Gatti's, I discovered not

only that nobody there had the slightest recollection of Oliver, but that no inquiries about him had ever been made by Major Fentiman?"

"Oh, dear me!" said Mr. Murbles.

"You forced Fentiman's hand very ingeniously by sending him down with your private sleuth to Charing Cross," remarked Parker, approvingly.

"Well, you see, I had a feeling that unless we did something pretty definite, Oliver would keep vanishing and reappearing like the Cheshire Cat, whenever our investigations seemed to be taking an awkward turn."

"You are intimating, if I understand you rightly," said Mr. Murbles, "that this Oliver has no real existence."

"Oliver was the carrot on the donkey's nose," said Peter, "my noble self being cast for the part of the donkey. Not caring for the rôle, I concocted a carrot of my own, in the person of Sleuths Incorporated. No sooner did my trusting sleuth depart to his lunch than, lo and behold! the hue and cry is off again after Oliver. Away goes friend Fentiman—and away goes Sleuth Number Two, who was there all the time, neatly camouflaged, to keep his eye on Fentiman. Why Fentiman should have gone to the length of assaulting a perfect stranger and accuse him of being Oliver, I don't know. I fancy his passion for thoroughness made him over-reach himself a bit there."

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"But what exactly has Major Fentiman been doing?" asked Mr. Murbles. "This is a very painful business, Lord Peter. It distresses me beyond words. Do you suspect him of—er—?"

"Well," said Wimsey, "I knew *something* odd had happened, you know, as soon as I saw the General's body—when I pulled the *Morning Post* away so easily from his hands. If he had really died clutching it, the rigour would have made his clutch so tight that one would have had to pry the fingers open to release it. And then, that knee-joint!"

"I didn't quite follow about that."

"Well, you know that when a man dies, rigour begins to set in after a period of some hours, varying according to the cause of death, temperature of the room and a lot of other conditions. It starts in the face and jaw and extends gradually over the body. Usually it lasts about twenty-four hours and then passes off again in the same order in which it started. But if, during the period of rigidity, you loosen one of the joints by main force, then it doesn't stiffen again, but remains loose. Which is why, in a hospital, if the nurses have carelessly let a patient die and stiffen with his knees up, they call in the largest and fattest person on the staff to sit on the corpse's knees and break the joints loose again."

Mr. Murbles shuddered distastefully.

"So that, taking the loose knee-joint and the

general condition of the body together, it was obvious from the start that somebody had been tampering with the General. Penberthy knew that too, of course, only, being a doctor, he wasn't going to make any indiscreet uproar if he could avoid it. It doesn't pay, you know."

"I suppose not."

"Well, then, you came round to me, sir, and insisted on making the uproar. I warned you, you know, to let sleeping dogs lie."

"I wish you had spoken more openly."

"If I had, would you have cared to hush the matter up?"

"Well, well," said Mr. Murbles, polishing his eyeglasses.

"Just so. The next step was to try and find out what had actually happened to the General on the night of the 10th, and morning of the 11th. And the moment I got round to his flat I was faced with two entirely contradictory pieces of evidence. First, there was the story about Oliver, which appeared more or less remarkable upon the face of it. And secondly, there was Woodward's evidence about the clothes."

"What about them?"

"I asked him, you remember, whether anything at all had been removed from the clothes after he had fetched them away from the cloak-room at the Bellona, and he said, nothing. His memory as to

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other points seemed pretty reliable, and I felt sure that he was honest and straightforward. So I was forced to the conclusion that, wherever the General had spent the night, he had certainly never set foot in the street the next morning."

"Why?" asked Mr. Murbles. "What did you expect to find on the clothes?"

"My dear sir, consider what day it was. November 11th. Is it conceivable that, if the old man had been walking in the streets as a free agent on Armistice Day, he would have gone into the Club without his Flanders poppy? A patriotic, military old bird like that? It was really unthinkable."

"Then where was he? And how did he get into the Club? He was there, you know."

"True; he *was* there—in a state of advanced rigour. In fact, according to Penberthy's account, which, by the way, I had checked by the woman who laid out the body later, the rigour was even then beginning to pass off. Making every possible allowance for the warmth of the room and so on, he must have been dead long before ten in the morning, which was his usual time for going to the Club."

"But, my dear lad, bless my soul, that's impossible. He couldn't have been carried in there dead. Somebody would have noticed it."

"So they would. And the odd thing is that nobody ever saw him arrive at all. What is more,

nobody saw him leave for the last time on the previous evening. General Fentiman—one of the best-known figures in the Club! And he seems to have become suddenly invisible. That won't do, you know."

"What is your idea, then? That he slept the night in the Club?"

"I think he slept a very peaceful and untroubled sleep that night—in the Club."

"You shock me inexpressibly," said Mr. Murbles. "I understand you to suggest that he died—"

"Some time the previous evening. Yes."

"But he couldn't have sat there all night in the smoking-room. The servants would have been bound to—er—notice him."

"Of course. But it was to somebody's interest to see that they didn't notice. Somebody who wanted it thought that he hadn't died till the following day, after the death of Lady Dormer."

"Robert Fentiman."

"Precisely."

"But how did Robert know about Lady Dormer?"

"Ah! That is a point I'm not altogether happy about. George had an interview with General Fentiman after the old man's visit to his sister. George denies that the General mentioned anything to him about the will, but then, if George

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was in the plot he naturally would deny it. I am rather concerned about George."

"What had he to gain?"

"Well, if George's information was going to make a difference of half a million to Robert, he would naturally expect to be given a share of the boodle, don't you think?"

Mr. Murbles groaned.

"Look here," broke in Parker, "this is a very pretty theory, Peter, but, allowing that the General died, as you say, on the evening of the tenth, where was the body? As Mr. Murbles says, it would have been a trifle noticeable if left about."

"No, no," said Mr. Murbles, seized with an idea. "Repellent as the whole notion is to me, I see no difficulty about that. Robert Fentiman was at that time living in the Club. No doubt the General died in Robert's bedroom and was concealed there till the next morning!"

Wimsey shook his head. "That won't work. I think the General's hat and coat and things were in Robert's bedroom, but the corpse couldn't have been. Think, sir. Here is a photograph of the entrance-hall, with the big staircase running up in full view of the front door and the desk and the bar-entrance. Would you risk carrying a corpse downstairs in the middle of the morning, with servants and members passing in and out continually? And the service stairs would be even worse.

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They are right round the other side of the building, with continual kitchen traffic going on all the time. No. The body wasn't in Robert's bedroom."

"Where, then?"

"Yes, where? After all, Peter, we've got to make this story hold water."

Wimsey spread the rest of the photographs out upon the table.

"Look for yourselves," he said. "Here is the end bay of the library, where the General was sitting making notes about the money he was to inherit. A very nice, retired spot, invisible from the doorway, supplied with ink, blotter, writing-paper and every modern convenience, including the works of Charles Dickens elegantly bound in morocco. Here is a shot of the library taken from the smoking-room, clean through the ante-room and down the gangway—again a tribute to the convenience of the Bellona Club. Observe how handily the telephone cabinet is situated, in case—"

"The telephone cabinet?"

"Which, you will remember, was so annoyingly labeled 'Out of Order' when Wetheridge wanted to telephone. I can't find anybody who remembers putting up that notice, by the way."

"Good God, Wimsey. Impossible. Think of the risk."

"What risk? If anybody opened the door, there was old General Fentiman, who had gone in, not

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seeing the notice, and died of fury at not being able to get his call. Agitation acting on a weak heart and all that. Not *very* risky, really. Unless somebody was to think to inquire about the notice, and probably it wouldn't occur to any one in the excitement of the moment."

"You're an ingenious beast, Wimsey."

"Aren't I? But we can prove it. We're going down to the Bellona Club to prove it now. Half-past eleven. A nice, quiet time. Shall I tell you what we are going to find inside that cabinet?"

"Finger-prints?" suggested Mr. Murbles, eagerly.

"Afraid that's too much to hope for after all this time. What do you say, Charles?"

"I say we shall find a long scratch on the paint," said Parker, "where the foot of the corpse rested and stiffened in that position."

"Holed it in one, Charles. And that, you see, was when the leg had to be bent with violence in order to drag the corpse out."

"And as the body was in a sitting position," pursued Parker, "we shall, of course, find a seat inside the cabinet."

"Yes, and, with luck, we *may* find a projecting nail or something which caught the General's trouser-leg when the body was removed."

"And possibly a bit of carpet."

"To match the fragment of thread I got off the corpse's right boot? I hope so."

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"Bless my soul," said Mr. Murbles. "Let us go at once. Really, this is most exciting. That is, I am profoundly grieved. I hope it is not as you say."

They hastened downstairs and stood for a few moments waiting for a taxi to pass. Suddenly Wimsey made a dive into a dark corner by the porch. There was a scuffle, and out into the light came a small man, heavily muffled in an overcoat, with his hat thrust down to his eyebrows in the manner of a stage detective. Wimsey unbonneted him with the air of a conjuror producing a rabbit from a hat.

"So it's you, is it? I thought I knew your face. What the devil do you mean by following people about like this?"

The man ceased struggling and glanced sharply up at him with a pair of dark, beady eyes.

"Do you think it wise, my lord, to use violence?"

"Who is it?" asked Parker.

"Pritchard's clerk. He's been hanging round George Fentiman for days. Now he's hanging round me. He's probably the fellow that's been hanging round the Bellona. If you go on like this, my man, you'll find yourself hanging somewhere else one of these days. Now, see here. Do you want me to give you in charge?"

"That is entirely as your lordship pleases," said the clerk, with a cunning sneer. "There is a police-

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man just round the corner, if you wish to attract publicity."

Wimsey looked at him for a moment, and then began to laugh.

"When did you last see Mr. Pritchard? Come on, out with it! Yesterday? This morning? Have you seen him since lunch time?"

A shadow of indecision crossed the man's face.

"You haven't? I'm sure you haven't! Have you?"

"And why not, my lord?"

"You go back to Mr. Pritchard," said Wimsey, impressively, and shaking his captive gently by the coat-collar to add force to his words, "and if he doesn't countermand your instructions and call you off this sleuthing business (which, by the way, you do very amateurishly), I'll give you a fiver. See? Now, hop it. I know where to find you and you know where to find me. Good-night and may Morpheus hover over your couch and bless your slumbers. Here's our taxi."

CHAPTER XIII

Spades Are Trumps

IT WAS CLOSE ON ONE O'CLOCK WHEN THE THREE men emerged from the solemn portals of the Bellona Club. Mr. Murbles was very much subdued. Wimsey and Parker displayed the sober elation of men whose calculations have proved satisfactory. They had found the scratches. They had found the nail in the seat of the chair. They had even found the carpet. Moreover, they had found the origin of Oliver. Reconstructing the crime, they had sat in the end bay of the library, as Robert Fentiman might have sat, casting his eyes around him while he considered how he could best hide and cover up this extremely inopportune decease. They had noticed how the gilt lettering on the back of a volume caught the gleam from the shaded reading lamp. "Oliver Twist." The name, not consciously noted at the time, had yet suggested itself an hour or so later to Fentiman, when, calling up from Charing Cross, he had been obliged to invent a surname on the spur of the moment.

And, finally, placing the light, spare form of the

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unwilling Mr. Murbles in the telephone cabinet, Parker had demonstrated that a fairly tall and strong man could have extricated the body from the box, carried it into the smoking-room and arranged it in the armchair by the fire, all in something under four minutes.

Mr. Murbles made one last effort on behalf of his client.

"There were people in the smoking-room all morning, my dear Lord Peter. If it were as you suggest, how could Fentiman have made sure of four, or even three minutes secure from observation while he brought the body in?"

"Were people there *all* morning, sir? Are you sure? Wasn't there just one period when one could be certain that everybody would be either out in the street or upstairs on the big balcony that runs along in front of the first-floor windows, looking out—and listening? It was Armistice Day, remember."

Mr. Murbles was horror-struck.

"The two-minutes' silence?—God bless my soul! How abominable! How—how blasphemous! Really, I cannot find words. This is the most disgraceful thing I ever heard of. At the moment when all our thoughts should be concentrated on the brave fellows who laid down their lives for us—to be engaged in perpetrating a fraud—an irreverent crime—"

"Half a million is a good bit of money," said Parker, thoughtfully.

"Horrible!" said Mr. Murbles.

"Meanwhile," said Wimsey, "what do you propose to do about it?"

"Do?" spluttered the old solicitor, indignantly.

"Do?—Robert Fentiman will have to confess to this disgraceful plot immediately. Bless my soul! To think that I should be mixed up in a thing like this! He will have to find another man of business in future. We shall have to explain matters to Pritchard and apologize. I really hardly know how to tell him such a thing."

"I rather gather he suspects a good deal of it already," said Parker, mildly. "Else why should he have sent that clerk of his to spy on you and George Fentiman? I daresay he has been keeping tabs on Robert, too."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Wimsey. "He certainly treated me like a conspirator when I called on him. The only thing that puzzles me now is why he should have suddenly offered to compromise."

"Probably Miss Dorland lost patience, or they despaired of proving anything," said Parker. "While Robert stuck to that Oliver story, it would be very hard to prove anything."

"Exactly," said Wimsey. "That is why I had to hang on so long, and press Robert so hard about

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it. I might suspect Oliver to be non-existent, but one can't prove a negative."

"And suppose he still sticks to the story now?"

"Oh! I think we can put the wind up him all right," said Wimsey. "By the time we've displayed our proofs and told him exactly what he was doing with himself on November 10th and 11th, he'll have no more spirit in him than the Queen of Sheba."

"It must be done at once," said Mr. Murbles. "And of course this exhumation business will have to be stopped. I will go round and see Robert Fentiman to-morrow—this morning, that is."

"Better tell him to trot round to your place," said Wimsey. "I'll bring all the evidence round there, and I'll have the varnish on the cabinet analyzed and shown to correspond with the sample I took from the General's boots. Make it for two o'clock, and then we can all go round and interview Pritchard afterwards."

Parker supported this suggestion. Mr. Murbles was so wrought up that he would gladly have rushed away to confront Robert Fentiman immediately. It being, however, pointed out to him that Fentiman was in Richmond, that an alarm at this ungodly hour might drive him to do something desperate, and also that all three investigators needed repose, the old gentleman gave way and permitted himself to be taken home to Staple Inn.

Wimsey went round to Parker's flat in Great Ormond Street to have a drink before turning in, and the session was prolonged till the small hours had begun to grow into big hours and the early workman was abroad.

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Lord Peter, having set the springe for his woodcock, slept the sleep of the just until close upon eleven o'clock the next morning. He was aroused by voices without, and presently his bedroom door was flung open to admit Mr. Murbles, of all people, in a high state of agitation, followed by Bunter, protesting.

"Hullo, sir!" said his lordship, much amazed. "What's up?"

"We have been outwitted," cried Mr. Murbles, waving his umbrella, "we have been forestalled! We should have gone to Major Fentiman last night. I wished to do so, but permitted myself to be persuaded against my better judgment. It will be a lesson to me."

He sat down, panting a little.

"My dear Mr. Murbles," said Wimsey, pleasantly, "your method of recalling one to the dull business of the day is as delightful as it is unexpected. Anything better calculated to dispel that sluggish feeling I can scarcely imagine. But pardon me—you are somewhat out of breath. Bunter! a whisky-and-soda for Mr. Murbles."

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"Indeed no!" ejaculated the solicitor, hurriedly. "I couldn't touch it. Lord Peter—"

"A glass of sherry?" suggested his lordship, helpfully.

"No, no—nothing, thanks. A shocking thing has occurred. We are left—"

"Better and better. A shock is exactly what I feel to need. My *café-au-lait*, Bunter—and you may turn the bath on. Now, sir—out with it. I am fortified against anything."

"Robert Fentiman," announced Mr. Murbles, impressively, "has disappeared."

He thumped his umbrella.

"Good God!" said Wimsey.

"He has gone," repeated the solicitor. "At ten o'clock this morning I attended in person at his rooms in Richmond—in *person*—in order to bring him the more effectually to a sense of his situation. I rang the bell. I asked for him. The maid told me he had left the night before. I asked where he had gone. She said she did not know. He had taken a suit-case with him. I interviewed the landlady. She told me that Major Fentiman had received an urgent message during the evening and had informed her that he was called away. He had not mentioned where he was going nor how soon he would return. I left a note addressed to him, and hastened back to Dover Street. The flat there was

shut up and untenanted. The man Woodward was nowhere to be found. I then came immediately to you. And I find you—”

Mr. Murbles waved an expressive hand at Wimsey, who was just taking from Bunter’s hands a chaste silver tray, containing a Queen Anne coffee-pot and milk-jug, a plate of buttered toast, a delicate china coffee-cup and a small pile of correspondence.

“So you do,” said Wimsey. “A depraved sight, I am afraid. H’m! It looks very much as though Robert had got wind of trouble and didn’t like to face the music.”

He sipped his *café-au-lait* delicately, his rather bird-like face cocked sideways. “But why worry? He can’t have got very far.”

“He may have gone abroad.”

“Possibly. All the better. The other party won’t want to take proceedings against him over there. Too much bother—however spiteful they may feel. Hallo! Here’s a writing I seem to recognize. Yes. It is my sleuth from Sleuths Incorporated. Wonder what *he* wants. I told him to go home and send the bill in.—Whew!”

“What is it?”

“This is the bloke who chased Fentiman to Southampton. Not the one who went on to Venice after the innocent Mr. Postlethwaite; the other. He’s writing from Paris. He says:

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‘My lord,

While making a few inquiries at Southampton pursuant to the investigation with which your lordship entrusted me’ (what marvelous English those fellows write, don’t they? Nearly as good as the regular police), ‘I came, almost accidentally’ (‘almost’ is good) ‘upon a trifling clue which led me to suppose that the party whom I was instructed by your lordship to keep under observation had been less in error than we were led to suppose, and had merely been misled by a confusion of identity natural in a gentleman not scientifically instructed in the art of following up suspected persons. In short’ (thank God for that!) ‘in short, I believe that I have myself come upon the track of O.’ (These fellows are amazingly cautious; he might just as well write Oliver and have done with it), ‘and have followed the individual in question to this place. I have telegraphed to the gentleman your friend’ (I presume that means Fentiman) ‘to join me immediately with a view to identifying the party. I will of course duly acquaint your lordship with any further developments in the case, and believe me’—and so forth.

“Well, I’m damned!”

“The man must be mistaken, Lord Peter.”

“I jolly well hope so,” said Wimsey, rather red in the face. “It’ll be a bit galling to have Oliver turning up, just when we’ve proved so conclu-

sively that he doesn't exist. Paris! I suppose he means that Fentiman spotted the right man at Waterloo and lost him on the train or in the rush for the boat. And got hold of Postlethwaite instead. Funny. Meanwhile, Fentiman's off to France. Probably taken the 10.30 boat from Folkestone. I don't know how we're to get hold of him."

"How very extraordinary," said Mr. Murbles. "Where does that detective person write from?"

"Just 'Paris,'" said Wimsey. "Bad paper and worse ink. And a small stain of *vin ordinaire*. Probably written in some little café yesterday afternoon. Not much hope there. But he's certain to let me know where they get to."

"We must send some one to Paris immediately in search of them," declared Mr. Murbles.

"Why?"

"To fetch Major Fentiman back."

"Yes, but look here, sir. If there really is an Oliver after all, it rather upsets our calculations, doesn't it?"

Mr. Murbles considered this.

"I cannot see that it affects our conclusions as to the hour of the General's death," he said.

"Perhaps not, but it considerably alters our position with regard to Robert Fentiman."

"Ye—es. Yes, that is so. Though," said Mr. Murbles, severely, "I still consider that the story requires close investigation."

"Agreed. Well, look here. I'll run over to Paris myself and see what I can do. And you had better temporize with Pritchard. Tell him you think there will be no need to compromise and that we hope soon to be in possession of the precise facts. That'll show him we don't mean to have any truck with anythin' fishy. I'll learn him to cast nasturtiums at me!"

"And—oh, dear! there's another thing. We must try and get hold of Major Fentiman to stop this exhumation."

"Oh, lord!—Yes. That's a bit awkward. Can't you stop it by yourself?"

"I hardly think I can. Major Fentiman has applied for it as executor, and I cannot quite see what I can do in the matter without his signature. The Home Office would hardly—"

"Yes. I quite see that you can't mess about with the Home Office. Well, though, that's easy. Robert never was keen on the resurrection idea. Once we've got his address, he'll be only too happy to send you a chit to call the whole thing off. You leave it to me. After all, even if we don't find Robert for a few days and the old boy has to be dug up after all, it won't make things any worse. Will it?"

Mr. Murbles agreed, dubiously.

"Then I'll pull the old carcass together," said Wimsey, brightly, flinging the bedclothes aside and

leaping to his feet, "and toddle off to the City of Light. Will you excuse me for a few moments, sir? The bath awaits me. Bunter, put a few things into a suit-case and be ready to come with me to Paris."

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On second thoughts, Wimsey waited till the next day, hoping, as he explained, to hear from the detective. As nothing reached him, however, he started in pursuit, instructing the head office of Sleuths Incorporated to wire any information received to him at the Hôtel Meurice. The next news that arrived from him was a card to Mr. Murbles written on a P.L.M. express, which said simply, "Quarry gone on to Rome. Hard on trail. P.W." The next day came a foreign telegram: "Making for Sicily. Faint but pursuing. P.W."

In reply to this, Mr. Murbles wired: "Exhumation fixed for day after to-morrow. Please make haste."

To which Wimsey replied: "Returning for exhumation. P.W."

He returned alone.

"Where is Robert Fentiman?" demanded Mr. Murbles, agitatedly.

Wimsey, his hair matted damply and his face white from traveling day and night, grinned feebly.

"I rather fancy," he said, in a wan voice, "that Oliver is at his old tricks again."

"Again?" cried Mr. Murbles, aghast. "But the letter from your detective was genuine."

"Oh, yes—that was genuine enough. But even detectives can be bribed. Anyhow, we haven't seen hide or hair of our friends. They've been always a little ahead. Like the Holy Grail, you know. Fainter by day but always in the night blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh, blood-red—perfectly bloody, in fact. Well, here we are. When does the ceremony take place? Quietly, I take it? No flowers?"

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The "ceremony" took place, as such ceremonies do, under the discreet cover of darkness. George Fentiman, who, in Robert's absence, attended to represent the family, was nervous and depressed. It is trying enough to go to the funeral of one's friends and relations, amid the grotesque pomps of glass hearses, and black horses, and wreaths, and appropriate hymns "beautifully" rendered by well-paid choristers, but, as George irritably remarked, the people who grumble over funerals don't realize their luck. However depressing the thud of earth on the coffin-lid may be, it is music compared to the rattle of gravel and thump of spades which herald a premature and unreverend resurrection,

enveloped in clouds of formalin and without benefit of clergy.

Dr. Penberthy also appeared abstracted, and anxious to get the business over. He made the journey to the cemetery ensconced in the farthest corner of the big limousine, and discussed thyroid abnormalities with Dr. Horner, Sir James Lubbock's assistant, who had come to help with the autopsy. Mr. Murbles was, naturally, steeped in gloom. Wimsey devoted himself to his accumulated correspondence, out of which one letter only had any bearing on the Fentiman case. It was from Marjorie Phelps, and ran:

"If you want to meet Ann Dorland, would you care to come along to a 'do' at the Rushworths' Wednesday week? It will be very deadly, because Naomi Rushworth's new young man is going to read a paper on ductless glands which nobody knows anything about. However, it appears that ductless glands will be 'news' in next to no time—ever so much more up-to-date than vitamins—so the Rushworths are all over glands—in the social sense, I mean. Ann D. is certain to be there, because as I told you, she is taking to this healthy bodies for all stunt, or whatever it is, so you'd better come. It will be company for me!—and I've got to go, anyway, as I'm supposed to be a friend of Naomi's. Besides, they say that if one paints or sculps or models, one ought to know all about

glands, because of the way they enlarge your jaw and alter your face, or something. Do come, because if you don't I shall be fastened on by some deadly bore or other—and I shall have to hear all Naomi's raptures about the man, which will be too awful."

Wimsey made a note to be present at this enlivening party, and looking round, saw that they were arriving at the Necropolis—so vast, so glittering with crystal-globed wreaths, so towering with skyscraping monuments, that no lesser name would serve it. At the gate they were met by Mr. Pritchard in person (acidulated in his manner and elaborately polite to Mr. Murbles), and by the Home Office representative (suave and bland and disposed to see reporters lurking behind every tombstone.) A third person, coming up, proved to be an official from the Cemetery Company, who took charge of the party and guided them along the neat graveled walks to where digging operations were already in process.

The coffin, being at length produced and identified by its brass plate, was then carefully borne to a small outbuilding close at hand, which appeared to be a potting-shed in ordinary life, converted by a board and a couple of trestles into a temporary mortuary. Here a slight halt and confusion was caused by the doctors, demanding in aggressively

cheerful and matter-of-fact tones more light and space to work in. The coffin was placed on a bench; somebody produced a mackintosh sheet and spread it on the trestle table; lamps were brought and suitably grouped. After which, the workmen advanced, a little reluctantly, to unscrew the coffin lid, preceded by Dr. Penberthy, scattering formalin from a spray, rather like an infernal thurifer at some particularly unwholesome sacrifice.

"Ah! very nice indeed," said Dr. Horner, appreciatively, as the corpse was disengaged from the coffin and transferred to the table. "Excellent. Not much difficulty over this job. That's the best of getting on to it at once. How long has he been buried, did you say? Three or four weeks? He doesn't look it. Will you make the autopsy or shall I? Just as you like. Very well. Where did I put my bag? Ah! thank you, Mr.—er—er—" (An unpleasantly-occupied pause, during which George Fentiman escaped, murmuring that he thought he'd have a smoke outside). "Undoubted heart trouble, of course, I don't see any unusual appearances, do you? . . . I suppose we'd better secure the stomach as it stands . . . pass me the gut, would you? Thanks. D'you mind holding while I get this ligature on? Ta." (Snip, snip.) "The jars are just behind you. Thanks. Look out! You'll have it over. Ha! ha! that was a near thing. Reminds me of Palmer, you know—and Cook's stomach—

always think that a very funny story, ha, ha!—I won't take all the liver—just a sample—it's only a matter of form—and sections of the rest—yes—better have a look at the brain while we are about it, I suppose. Have you got the large saw?"

"How callous these medical men seem," murmured Mr. Murbles.

"It's nothing to them," said Wimsey. "Horner does this kind of job several times a week."

"Yes, but he need not be so noisy. Dr. Penberthy behaves with decorum."

"Penberthy runs a practice," said Wimsey with a faint grin. "He has to exercise a little restraint over himself. Besides, he knew old Fentiman, and Horner didn't."

At length the relevant portions of General Fentiman's anatomy having been collected into suitable jars and bottles, the body was returned to the coffin and screwed down. Penberthy came across to Wimsey and took his arm.

"We ought to be able to get a pretty good idea of what you want to know," he said. "Decomposition is very little advanced, owing to an exceptionally well-made coffin. By the way" (he dropped his voice) "that leg, you know—did it ever occur to you—or rather, did you ever discover any explanation of that?"

"I *did* have an idea about it," admitted Wimsey, "but I don't yet know whether it was the right

one. I shall probably know for certain in a day or two."

"You think the body was interfered with?" said Penberthy, looking him steadily in the face.

"Yes, and so do you," replied Wimsey, returning the gaze.

"I've had my suspicions all the time, of course. I told you so, you know. I wonder whether—you don't think I was wrong to give the certificate, do you?"

"Not unless you suspected anything wrong with the death itself," said Wimsey. "Have you and Horner noticed anything queer?"

"No. But—oh, well! having patients dug up always makes me worried, you know. It's easy to make a mistake and one looks an awful fool in court. I'd hate being made to look a fool just at present," added the doctor with a nervous laugh. "I'm thinking of—great Scott, man! how you startled me!"

Dr. Horner had brought a large, bony hand down on his shoulder. He was a red-faced, jovial man, and he smiled as he held up his bag before them.

"All packed up and ready," he announced. "Got to be getting back now, aha! Got to be getting back."

"Have the witnesses signed the labels?" asked Penberthy, rather shortly.

"Yes, yes, quite all right. Both the solicitor johnnies, so they can't quarrel about *that* in the witness-box," replied Horner. "Come along, please—I've got to get off."

They found George Fentiman outside, seated on a tombstone, and sucking at an empty pipe.

"Is it all over?"

"Yes."

"Have they found anything?"

"Haven't looked yet," broke in Horner, genially. "Not at the part which interests *you*, that is. Leave that for my colleague Lubbock, you know. Soon give you an answer—say, in a week's time."

George passed his handkerchief over his forehead, which was beaded with little drops of sweat.

"I don't like it," he said. "But I suppose it had to be done. What was that? I thought—I'd swear I saw something moving over there."

"A cat, probably," said Penberthy, "there's nothing to be alarmed at."

"No," said George, "but sitting about here, one—fancies things." He hunched his shoulders, squinting round at them with the whites of his eyeballs showing.

"Things," he said, "people—going to and fro . . . and walking up and down. Following one."

CHAPTER XIV

Grand Slam In Spades

ON THE SEVENTH MORNING AFTER THE EXHUMATION—which happened to be a Tuesday—Lord Peter walked briskly into Mr. Murbles' chambers in Staple Inn, with Detective-Inspector Parker at his heels.

"Good morning," said Mr. Murbles, surprised.

"Good morning," said Wimsey. "Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings. He is coming, my own, my sweet, were it ever so airy a tread. He will be here in a quarter of an hour."

"Who will?" demanded Mr. Murbles, somewhat severely.

"Robert Fentiman."

Mr. Murbles gave a little ejaculation of surprise.

"I had almost given up hope in that direction," he said.

"So had not I. I said to myself, he is not lost but gone before. And it was so. Charles, we will lay out the *pièces de conviction* on the table. The boots. The photographs. The microscopic slides showing the various specimens. The paper of notes

from the library. The outer garments of the deceased. Just so. And 'Oliver Twist.' Beautiful. Now, as Sherlock Holmes says, we shall look imposing enough to strike terror into the guilty breast, though armed in triple steel."

"Did Fentiman return of his own accord?"

"Not altogether. He was, if I may so express myself, led. Almost, in fact, led on. O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent till, don't you know. What is that noise in the outer room? It is, it is the cannon's opening roar."

It was, indeed, the voice of Robert Fentiman, not in the best of tempers. In a few seconds he was shown in. He nodded curtly to Mr. Murbles, who replied with a stiff bow, and then turned violently upon Wimsey.

"Look here, what's the meaning of all this? Here's that damned detective fellow of yours leading me a devil of a dance all over Europe and home again, and then this morning he suddenly turns round and tells me that you want to see me here with news about Oliver. What the devil do you know about Oliver?"

"Oliver?" said Wimsey. "Oh, yes—he's an elusive personality. Almost as elusive in Rome as he was in London. Wasn't it odd, Fentiman, the way he always seemed to bob up directly your back was turned? Wasn't it funny, the way he managed to disappear from places the moment you set foot in

'em? Almost like the way he used to hang about Gatti's and then give you and me the slip. Did you have a jolly time abroad, old man? I suppose you didn't like to tell your companion that he and you were chasing a will o' the wisp?"

Robert Fentiman's face was passing through phases ranging from fury to bewilderment and back again. Mr. Murbles interrupted.

"Has this detective vouchsafed any explanation of his extraordinary behaviour, in keeping us in the dark for nearly a fortnight as to his movements?"

"I'm afraid I owe you the explanation," said Wimsey, airily. "You see, I thought it was time the carrot was dangled before the other donkey. I knew that if we pretended to find Oliver in Paris, Fentiman would be in honour bound to chase after him. In fact, he was probably only too pleased to get away—weren't you, Fentiman?"

"Do you mean to say that you invented all this story about Oliver, Lord Peter?"

"I did. Not the original Oliver, of course, but the Paris Oliver. I told the sleuth to send a wire from Paris to summon our friend away and keep him away."

"But why?"

"I'll explain that later. And of course you had to go, hadn't you, old man? Because you couldn't very well refuse to go without confessing that there was no such person as Oliver?"

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"Damnation!" burst out Fentiman, and then suddenly began to laugh. "You cunning little devil! I began to think there was something fishy about it, you know. When that first wire came, I was delighted. Thought the sleuth-hound fellow had made a perfectly providential floater, don't you know. And the longer we kept tootin' round Europe the better I was pleased. But when the hare started to double back to England, home and beauty, I began to get the idea that somebody was pullin' my leg. By the way, was that why I was able to get all my visas with that uncanny facility at an unearthly hour overnight?"

"It was," said Wimsey, modestly.

"I might have known there was something wrong about it. You devil! Well—what now?—If you've exploded Oliver, I suppose you've spilled all the rest of the beans, eh?"

"If you mean by that expression," said Mr. Murbles, "that we are aware of your fraudulent and disgraceful attempt to conceal the true time of General Fentiman's decease, the answer is, Yes—we do know it. And I may say that it has come as a most painful shock to my feelings."

Fentiman flung himself into a chair, slapping his thigh and roaring with laughter.

"I might have known you'd be on to it," he gasped, "but it was a damn good joke, wasn't it? Good lord! I couldn't help chuckling to myself,

you know. To think of all those refrigerated old imbeciles at the Club sittin' solemnly round there, and comin' in and noddin' to the old guv'nor like so many mandarins, when he was as dead as a door-nail all the time. That leg of his was a bit of a slip-up, of course, but that was an accident. Did you ever find out where he was all the time?"

"Oh, yes—pretty conclusively. You left your marks on the cabinet, you know."

"No, did we? Hell!"

"Yes—and when you stuck the old boy's overcoat back in the cloak-room, you forgot to stick a poppy in it."

"Oh, lord! that *was* a bloomer. D'you know, I never thought of that. Oh, well! I suppose I couldn't hope to carry it off with a confounded bloodhound like you on the trail. But it was fun while it lasted. Even now, the thought of old Bunter solemnly callin' up two and a half columns of *Olivers* makes me shout with joy. It's almost as good as getting the half-million."

"That reminds me," said Wimsey. "The one thing I don't know is how you knew about the half-million. Did Lady Dormer tell you about her will? Or did you hear of it from George?"

"George? Great scott, no! George knew nothing about it. The old boy told me himself."

"General Fentiman?"

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"Of course. When he came back to the Club that night, he came straight up to see me."

"And we never thought of that," said Wimsey, crushed. "Too obvious, I suppose."

"You can't be expected to think of everything," said Robert, condescendingly. "I think you did very well, take it all round. Yes—the old boy toddled up to me and told me all about it. He said I wasn't to tell George, because he wasn't quite satisfied with George—about Sheila, you know—and he wanted to think it over and see what was best to be done, in the way of making a new will, you see."

"Just so. And he went down to the library to do it."

"That's right; and I went down and had some grub. Well then, afterwards I thought perhaps I hadn't said quite enough on behalf of old George. I mean, the gov'nor needed to have it pointed out to him that George's queerness was caused a great deal by bein' dependent on Sheila and all that, and if he had some tin of his own he'd be much better-tempered—you get me? So I hopped through to the library to find the gov'—and there he was—dead!"

"What time was that?"

"Somewhere round about eightish, I should think. Well, I was staggered. Of course, my first idea was to call for help, but it wasn't any go.

He was quite dead. And then it jolly well came over me all at once how perfectly damnably we had missed the train. Just to think of that awful Dorland woman walking into all those thousands—I tell you, it made me so bally wild, I could have exploded and blown the place up! . . . And then, you know, I began to get a sort of creepy feeling, alone there with the body and nobody in the library at all. We seemed cut off from the world, as the writing fellows say. And then it just seemed to take hold of my mind, why should he have died like that?—I did have a passing hope that the old girl might have pegged out first, and I was just going along to the telephone to find out, when—thinking of the telephone cabinet, you see—the whole thing popped into my head ready-made, as you might say. In three minutes I'd lugged him along and stuck him up on the seat, and then I hopped back to write a label for the door. I say, I thought I was jolly smart to remember not to blot that label on the library blotting-paper."

"Believe me," said Wimsey, "I appreciated that point."

"Good. I'm glad you did. Well, it was pretty plain sailing after that. I got the guv'nor's togs from the cloak-room and took 'em up to my room, and then I thought about old Woodward sittin' up waitin' for him. So I trundled out and went down to Charing Cross—how do you think?"

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"By bus?"

"Not quite as bad as that. By Underground. I did realize it wouldn't work to call a taxi."

"You show quite a disposition for fraud, Fentiman."

"Yes, don't I?—Well, all that was easy. I must say, I didn't pass a frightfully good night."

"You'll take it more calmly another time."

"Yes—it was my maiden effort in crime, of course. The next morning——"

"Young man," said Mr. Murbles, in an awful voice, "we will draw a veil over the next morning. I have listened to your shameless statement with a disgust which words cannot express. But I cannot, and I will not sit here and listen while you congratulate yourself, with a cynicism at which you should blush, on having employed those sacred moments when every thought should have been consecrated——"

"Oh, punk!" interrupted Robert, rudely. "My old pals are none the worse because I did a little bit of self-help. I know fraud isn't altogether the clean potato, but, dash it all! surely we have a better right to the old boy's money than that girl. I bet *she* never did anything in the Great War, Daddy. Well, it's all gone bust—but it was a darn good stunt while it lasted."

"I perceive," replied Mr. Murbles, icily, "that any appeal to your better feelings would be waste

of time. I imagine, however, you realize that fraud is a penal offence."

"Yes—that's a nuisance, isn't it? What are we going to do about it? Do I have to go and eat humble pie to old Pritchard? Or does Wimsey pretend to have discovered something frightfully abstruse from looking at the body?—Oh, good lord, by the way—what's happened about that confounded exhumation stunt? I never thought a word more about it. I say, Wimsey, was that the idea? Did you know then that I'd been trying to work this stunt and was it your notion you could get me out of it?"

"Partly."

"Damned decent of you. You know, I did tumble to it that you'd got a line on me when you sent me down with that detective fellow to Charing Cross. And, I say, you nearly had me there! I'd made up my mind to pretend to go after Oliver—you know—and then I spotted that second bloodhound of yours on the train with me. That gave me gooseflesh all over. The only thing I could think of—short of chucking up the whole show—was to accuse some harmless old bird of being Oliver—as a proof of good faith, don't you see."

"That was it, was it? I thought you must have some reason."

"Yes—and then, when I got that summons to

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Paris, I thought I must, somehow, have diddled the lot of you. But I suppose that was all arranged for. I say, Wimsey, why? Did you just want to get your own back, or what? Why did you want me out of England?"

"Yes, indeed, Lord Peter," said Mr. Murbles, gravely. "I think you owe *me* at least some explanation on that point."

"Don't you see," said Wimsey, "Fentiman was his grandfather's executor. If I got him out of the way, you couldn't stop the exhumation."

"Ghoul!" said Robert. "I believe you batten on corpses."

Wimsey laughed, rather excitedly.

"Fentiman," he said, "what would you give at this moment for your chance of that half-million?"

"Chance?" cried Fentiman. "There's no chance at all. What do you mean?"

Wimsey slowly drew a paper from his pocket.

"This came last night," he said. "And, by jove, my lad, it's lucky for you that you had a good bit to lose by the old man's death. This is from Lubbock—

'Dear Lord Peter,

I am sending you a line in advance to let you know the result of the autopsy on General Fentiman. As regards the ostensible reason for the investigation, I may say that there was no food in

the stomach and that the last meal had been taken several hours previously. The important point, however, is that, following your own rather obscurely-expressed suggestion, I tested the viscera for poison and discovered traces of a powerful dose of digitalin, swallowed not very long previous to decease. As you know, with a subject whose heart was already in a weak state, the result of such a dose could not but be fatal. The symptoms would be a slowing-down of the heart's action and collapse—practically indistinguishable from a violent heart-attack.

I do not, of course, know what your attitude in this business is, though I congratulate you on the perspicacity which prompted you to suggest an analysis. In the meanwhile, of course, you will realize that I am obliged to communicate the result of the autopsy to the public prosecutor.' ”

Mr. Murbles sat petrified.

“My God!” cried Fentiman. And then again, “My God!—Wimsey—if I'd known—if I'd had the faintest idea—I wouldn't have touched the body for twenty millions. Poison! Poor old blighter! What a damned shame! I remember now his saying that night he felt a bit sickish, but I never thought—I say, Wimsey—you do believe, don't you, that I hadn't the foggiest? I say—that awful female—I knew she was a wrong 'un. But poison! that is too thick. Good lord!”

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Parker, who had hitherto preserved the detached expression of a friendly spectator, now beamed. "Damn good, old man!" he cried, and smote Peter on the back. Professional enthusiasm overcame him. "It's a real case," he said, "and you've handled it finely, Peter. I didn't know you had it in you to hang on so patiently. Forcing the exhumation on 'em through putting pressure on Major Fentiman was simply masterly! Pretty work! Pretty work!"

"Thank you, Charles," said Wimsey, dryly. "I'm glad somebody appreciates me. Anyhow," he added, viciously, "I bet that's wiped old Pritchard's eye."

And at this remark, even Mr. Murbles showed signs of returning animation.

CHAPTER XV

Shuffle The Cards And Deal Again

A HASTY CONSULTATION WITH THE POWERS that be at Scotland Yard put Detective-Inspector Parker in charge of the Fentiman case, and he promptly went into consultation with Wimsey.

"What put you on to this poison business?" he asked.

"Aristotle, chiefly," replied Wimsey. "He says, you know, that one should always prefer the probable impossible to the improbable possible. It was possible, of course, that the General should have died off in that neat way at the most confusing moment. But how much nicer and more probable that the whole thing had been stage-managed. Even if it had seemed much more impossible I should have been dead nuts on murder. And there really was nothing impossible about it. Then there was Pritchard and the Dorland woman. Why should they have been so dead against compromise and so suspicious about things unless they had inside information from somewhere. After all, they hadn't seen the body as Penberthy and I did."

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"That leads on to the question of who did it. Miss Dorland is the obvious suspect, naturally."

"She's got the biggest motive."

"Yes. Well, let's be methodical. Old Fentiman was apparently as right as rain up till about half past three when he started off for Portman Square, so that the drug must have been given him between then and eightish, when Robert Fentiman found him dead. Now who saw him between those two times?"

"Wait a sec. That's not absolutely accurate. He must have *taken* the stuff between those two times, but it might have been *given* him earlier. Suppose, for instance, somebody had dropped a poisoned pill into his usual bottle of soda-mints or whatever he used to take. That could have been worked at any time."

"Well—not too early on, Peter. Suppose he had died a lot too soon and Lady Dormer had heard about it."

"It wouldn't have made any difference. She wouldn't need to alter her will, or anything. The bequest to Miss Dorland would just stand as before."

"Quite right. I was being stupid. Well, then, we'd better find out if he did take anything of that kind regularly. If he did, who would have had the opportunity to drop the pill in?"

"Penberthy, for one."

"The doctor?—yes, we must stick his name down as a possible, though he wouldn't have had the slightest motive. Still, we'll put him in the column headed Opportunity."

"That's right, Charles. I do like your methodical ways."

"Attraction of opposites," said Parker, ruling a notebook into three columns. "Opportunity. Number 1, Dr. Penberthy. If the tablets or globules or whatever they were, were Penberthy's own prescription, he would have a specially good opportunity. Not so good, though, if they were the kind of things you get ready-made from the chemist in sealed bottles."

"Oh, bosh! he could always have asked to have a squint at 'em to see if they were the right kind. I insist on having Penberthy in. Besides, he was one of the people who saw the General between the critical hours—during what we may call the administration period, so he had an extra amount of opportunity."

"So he had. Well, I've put him down. Though there seems no reason for him——"

"I'm not going to be put off by a trifling objection like that. He had the opportunity, so down he goes. Well, then, Miss Dorland comes next."

"Yes. She goes down under opportunity and also under motive. She certainly had a big interest in polishing off the old man, she saw him during the

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period of administration and she very likely gave him something to eat or drink while he was in the house. So she is a very likely subject. The only difficulty with her is the difficulty of getting hold of the drug. You can't get digitalin just by asking for it, you know."

"N—no. At least, not by itself. You can get it mixed up with other drugs quite easily. I saw an ad. in the *Daily Views* only this morning, offering a pill with half a grain of digitalin in it."

"Did you? where?—oh, that! Yes, but it's got nux vomica in it too, which is supposed to be an antidote. At any rate, it bucks the heart up by stimulating the nerves, so as to counteract the slowing-down action of the digitalin."

"H'm. Well, put down Miss Dorland under Means with a query-mark. Oh, of course, Penberthy has to go down under Means too. He is the one person who could get the stuff without any bother."

"Right. Means: No. 1, Dr. Penberthy. Opportunity: No. 1, Dr. Penberthy, No. 2, Miss Dorland. We'll have to put in the servants at Lady Dormer's too, shan't we? Any of them who brought him food or drink, at any rate."

"Put 'em in, by all means. They might have been in collusion with Miss Dorland. And how about Lady Dormer herself?"

"Oh, come, Peter. There wouldn't be any sense in that."

"Why not? She may have been planning revenge on her brother all these years, camouflaging her feelings under a pretense of generosity. It would be rather fun to leave a terrific legacy to somebody you loathed, and then, just when he was feelin' nice and grateful and all over coals of fire, poison him to make sure he didn't get it. We simply must have Lady Dormer. Stick her down under Opportunity and under Motive."

"I refuse to do more than Opportunity and Motive (query?)."

"Have it your own way. Well, now—there are our friends the two taxi-drivers."

"I don't think you can be allowed those. It would be awfully hard work poisoning a fare, you know."

"I'm afraid it would. I say! I've just got a rip-pin' idea for poisoning a taxi-man, though. You give him a dud half-crown, and when he bites it——"

"He dies of lead poisoning. That one's got whiskers on it."

"Juggins. You poison the half-crown with Prussic acid."

"Splendid! And he falls down foaming at the mouth. That's frightfully brilliant. Do you mind giving your attention to the matter in hand?"

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"You think we can leave out the taxi-drivers, then?"

"I think so."

"Right-oh! I'll let you have them. That brings us, I'm sorry to say, to George Fentiman."

"You've got rather a weakness for George Fentiman, haven't you?"

"Yes—I like old George. He's an awful pig in some ways, but I quite like him."

"Well, I don't know George, so I shall firmly put him down. Opportunity No. 3, he is."

"He'll have to go down under Motive, too, then."

"Why? What did he stand to gain by Miss Dorland's getting the legacy?"

"Nothing—if he knew about it. But Robert says emphatically that he didn't know. So does George. And if he didn't, don't you see, the General's death meant that he would immediately step into that two thousand quid which Dougal McStewart was being so pressing about."

"McStewart?—oh, yes—the money-lender. That's one up to you, Peter; I'd forgotten him. That certainly does put George on the list of the possibles. He was pretty sore about things too, wasn't he?"

"Very. And I remember his saying one rather unguarded thing at least down at the Club on the

very day the murder—or rather, the death—was discovered.”

“That’s in his favour, if anything,” said Parker, cheerfully, “unless he’s very reckless indeed.”

“It won’t be in his favour with the police,” grumbled Wimsey.

“My dear man!”

“I beg your pardon. I was forgetting for the moment. I’m afraid you are getting a little above your job, Charles. So much intelligence will spell either a Chief-Commissionership or ostracism if you aren’t careful.”

“I’ll chance that. Come on—get on with it. Who else is there?”

“There’s Woodward. Nobody could have a better opportunity of tampering with the General’s pill-boxes.”

“And I suppose his little legacy might have been a motive.”

“Or he may have been in the enemy’s pay. Sinister men-servants so often are, you know. Look what a boom there has been lately in criminal butlers and thefts by perfect servants.”

“That’s a fact. And now, how about the people at the Bellona?”

“There’s Wetheridge. He’s a disagreeable devil. And he has always cast covetous eyes at the General’s chair by the fire. I’ve seen him.”

“Be serious, Peter.”

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"I'm perfectly serious. I don't like Wetheridge. He annoys me. And then we mustn't forget to put down Robert."

"Robert? Why, he's the one person we can definitely cross off. He knew it was to his interest to keep the old man alive. Look at the pains he took to cover up the death."

"Exactly. He is the Most Unlikely Person, and that is why Sherlock Holmes would suspect him at once. He was, by his own admission, the last person to see General Fentiman alive. Suppose he had a row with the old man and killed him, and then discovered, afterwards, about the legacy."

"You're scintillating with good plots to-day, Peter. If they'd quarreled, he might possibly have knocked his grandfather down—though I don't think he'd do such a rotten and unsportsmanlike thing—but he surely wouldn't have poisoned him."

Wimsey sighed.

"There's something in what you say," he admitted. "Still, you never know. Now then, is there any name we've thought of which appears in all three columns of our list?"

"No, not one. But several appear in two."

"We'd better start on those, then. Miss Dorland is the most obvious, naturally, and after her, George, don't you think?"

"Yes. I'll have a round-up among all the chem-

ists who may possibly have supplied her with the digitalin. Who's her family doctor?"

"Dunno. That's your pigeon. By the way, I'm supposed to be meeting the girl at a cocoa-party or something of the sort to-morrow. Don't pinch her before then if you can help it."

"No; but it looks to me as though we might need to put a few questions. And I'd like to have a look round Lady Dormer's house."

"For heaven's sake, don't be flat-footed about it, Charles. Use tact."

"You can trust your father. And, I say, you might take me down to the Bellona in a tactful way. I'd like to ask a question or two there."

Wimsey groaned.

"I shall be asked to resign if this goes on. Not that it's much loss. But it would please Wetheridge so much to see the back of me. Never mind. I'll make a Martha of myself. Come on."

The entrance of the Bellona Club was filled with an unseemly confusion. Culyer was arguing heatedly with a number of men and three or four members of the committee stood beside him with brows as black as thunder. As Wimsey entered, one of the intruders caught sight of him with a yelp of joy.

"Wimsey—Wimsey, old man! Here, be a sport and get us in on this. We've got to have the story

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some day. You probably know all about it, you old blighter."

It was Salcombe Hardy of the *Daily Yell*, large and untidy and slightly drunk as usual. He gazed at Wimsey with child-like blue eyes. Barton of the *Banner*, red-haired and pugnacious, faced round promptly.

"Ah, Wimsey, that's fine. Give us a line on this, can't you? Do explain that if we get a story we'll be good and go."

"Good lord," said Wimsey, "how do these things get into the papers?"

"I think it's rather obvious," said Culyer, acidly.

"It wasn't me," said Wimsey.

"No, no," put in Hardy. "You mustn't think that. It was my stunt. In fact, I saw the whole show up at the Necropolis. I was on a family vault, pretending to be a recording angel."

"You would be," said Wimsey. "Just a moment, Culyer." He drew the secretary aside. "See here, I'm damned annoyed about this, but it can't be helped. You can't stop these boys when they're after a story. And anyway, it's all got to come out. It's a police affair now. This is Detective-Inspector Parker of Scotland Yard."

"But what's the matter?" demanded Culyer.

"Murder's the matter, I'm afraid."

"Oh, hell!"

"Sorry and all that. But you'd better grin and

bear it. Charles, give these fellows as much story as you think they ought to have and get on with it. And, Salcombe, if you'll call off your tripe-hounds, we'll let you have an interview and a set of photographs."

"That's the stuff," said Hardy.

"I'm sure," agreed Parker, pleasantly, "that you lads don't want to get in the way, and I'll tell you all that's advisable. Show us a room, Captain Culyer, and I'll send out a statement and then you'll let us get to work."

This was agreed, and, a suitable paragraph having been provided by Parker, the Fleet Street gang departed, bearing Wimsey away with them like a captured Sabine maiden to drink in the nearest bar, in the hope of acquiring picturesque detail.

"But I wish you'd kept out of it, Sally," mourned Peter.

"Oh, God," said Salcombe, "nobody loves us. It's a forsaken thing to be a poor bloody reporter." He tossed a lank black lock of hair back from his forehead and wept.

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Parker's first and most obvious move was to interview Penberthy, whom he caught at Harley Street, after surgery hours.

"Now I'm not going to worry you about that certificate, doctor," he began, pleasantly. "We're all liable to make mistakes, and I understand that

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a death resulting from an over-dose of digitalin would look very like a death from heart-failure."

"It would *be* a death from heart-failure," corrected the doctor, patiently. Doctors are weary of explaining that heart-failure is not a specific disease, like mumps or housemaid's knee. It is this incompatibility of outlook between the medical and the lay mind which involves counsel and medical witnesses in a fog of misunderstanding and mutual irritation.

"Just so," said Parker. "Now, General Fentiman had got heart disease already, hadn't he? Is digitalin a thing one takes for heart disease?"

"Yes; in certain forms of heart disease, digitalin is a very valuable stimulant."

"Stimulant? I thought it was a depressant."

"It acts as a stimulant at first; in later stages it depresses the heart's action."

"Oh, I see." Parker did not see very well, since, like most people, he had a vague idea that each drug has one simple effect appropriate to it, and is, specifically, a cure for something or the other. "It first speeds up the heart and then slows it down."

"Not exactly. It strengthens the heart's action by retarding the beat, so that the cavities can be more completely emptied and the pressure is relieved. We give it in certain cases of valvular disease—under proper safeguards, of course."

"Were you giving it to General Fentiman?"

"I had given it him from time to time."

"On the afternoon of November 10th,—you remember that he came to you in consequence of a heart attack. Did you give him digitalin then?"

Dr. Penberthy appeared to hesitate painfully for a moment. Then he turned to his desk and extracted a large book.

"I had better be perfectly frank with you," he said. "I did. When he came to me, the feebleness of the heart's action and the extreme difficulty in breathing suggested the urgent necessity of a cardiac stimulant. I gave him a prescription containing a small quantity of digitalin to relieve this condition. Here is the prescription. I will write it out for you."

"A small quantity?" repeated Parker.

"Quite small, combined with other drugs to counteract the depressing after-effects."

"It was not as large as the dose afterwards found in the body?"

"Good heavens, no—nothing like. In a case like General Fentiman's, digitalin is a drug to be administered with the greatest caution."

"It would not be possible, I suppose, for you to have made a mistake in dispensing? To have given an overdose by error?"

"That possibility occurred to me at once, but as soon as I heard Sir James Lubbock's figures, I

realized that it was quite out of the question. The dose given was enormous; nearly two grains. But, to make quite certain, I have had my supply of the drug carefully checked, and it is all accounted for."

"Who did that for you?"

"My trained nurse. I will let you have the books and chemists' receipts."

"Thank you. Did your nurse make up the dose for General Fentiman?"

"Oh, no; it is a prescription I always keep by me, ready made up. If you'd like to see her, she will show it to you."

"Thanks very much. Now, when General Fentiman came to see you, he had just had an attack. Could that have been caused by digitalin?"

"You mean, had he been poisoned before he came to me? Well, of course, digitalin is rather an uncertain drug."

"How long would a big dose like that take to act?"

"I should expect it to take effect fairly quickly. In the ordinary way it would cause sickness and vertigo. But with a powerful cardiac stimulant like digitalin, the chief danger is that any sudden movement, such as springing suddenly to one's feet from a position of repose, is liable to cause sudden syncope and death. I should say that this was what occurred in General Fentiman's case."

"And that might have happened at any time after the administration of the dose?"

"Just so."

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you, Dr. Penberthy. I will just see your nurse and take copies of the entries in your books, if I may."

This done, Parker made his way to Portman Square, still a little hazy in his mind as to the habits of the common foxglove when applied internally—a haziness which was in no way improved by a subsequent consultation of the *Materia Medica*, the *Pharmacopœia*, Dixon Mann, Taylor, Glaister, and others of those writers who have so kindly and helpfully published their conclusions on toxicology.

CHAPTER XVI

Quadrille

"MRS. RUSHWORTH, THIS IS LORD PETER WIMSEY. Naomi, this is Lord Peter. He's fearfully keen on glands and things, so I've brought him along. And Naomi, do tell me all about your news. Who is it? Do I know him?"

Mrs. Rushworth was a long, untidy woman, with long, untidy hair wound into bell-pushes over her ears. She beamed short-sightedly at Peter.

"So glad to see you. So very wonderful about glands, isn't it? Dr. Voronoff, you know, and those marvelous old sheep. Such a hope for all of us. Not that dear Walter is specially interested in rejuvenation. Perhaps life is long and difficult enough as it is, don't you think—so full of problems of one kind and another. And the insurance companies have quite set their faces against it, or so I understand. That's natural, isn't it, when you come to think of it. But the effect on character is so interesting, you know. Are you devoted to young criminals by any chance?"

Wimsey said that they presented a very perplexing problem.

"How very true. So perplexing. And just to think that we have been quite wrong about them all these thousands of years. Flogging and bread-and-water, you know, and Holy Communion, when what they really needed was a little bit of rabbit-gland or something to make them just as good as gold. Quite terrible, isn't it? And all those poor freaks in sideshows, too—dwarfs and giants, you know—all pineal or pituitary, and they come right again. Though I daresay they make a great deal more money as they are, which throws such a distressing light on unemployment, does it not?"

Wimsey said that everything had the defects of its qualities.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mrs. Rushworth. "But I think it is so infinitely more heartening to look at it from the opposite point of view. Everything has the qualities of its defects, too, has it not? It is so important to see these things in their true light. It will be such a joy for Naomi to be able to help dear Walter in this great work. I hope you will feel eager to subscribe to the establishment of the new Clinic."

Wimsey asked, what new Clinic.

"Oh! hasn't Marjorie told you about it? The new Clinic to make everybody good by glands. That is what dear Walter is going to speak about. He is so keen and so is Naomi. It was such a joy to me when Naomi told me that they were really engaged, you

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know. Not that her old mother hadn't suspected something, of course," added Mrs. Rushworth, archly. "But young people are so odd nowadays and keep their affairs so much to themselves."

Wimsey said that he thought both parties were heartily to be congratulated. And indeed, from what he had seen of Naomi Rushworth, he felt that she at least deserved congratulation, for she was a singularly plain girl, with a face like a weasel.

"You will excuse me if I run off and speak to some of these other people, won't you?" went on Mrs. Rushworth. "I'm sure you will be able to amuse yourself. No doubt you have many friends in my little gathering."

Wimsey glanced round and was about to felicitate himself on knowing nobody, when a familiar face caught his eye.

"Why," said he, "there is Dr. Penberthy."

"Dear Walter!" cried Mrs. Rushworth, turning hurriedly in the direction indicated. "I declare, so he is. Ah, well—now we shall be able to begin. He should have been here before, but a doctor's time is never his own."

"Penberthy?" said Wimsey, half aloud, "good lord!"

"Very sound man," said a voice beside him. "Don't think the worse of his work from seeing him in this crowd. Beggars in a good cause can't be choosers, as we parsons know too well."

Wimsey turned to face a tall, lean man, with a handsome, humorous face, whom he recognized as a well-known slum padre.

"Father Whittington, isn't it?"

"The same. You're Lord Peter Wimsey, I know. We've got an interest in crime in common, haven't we? I'm interested in this glandular theory. It may throw a great light on some of our heart-breaking problems."

"Glad to see there's no antagonism between religion and science," said Wimsey.

"Of course not. Why should there be? We are all searching for Truth."

"And all these?" asked Wimsey, indicating the curious crowd with a wave of the hand.

"In their way. They mean well. They do what they can, like the woman in the Gospels, and they are surprisingly generous. Here's Penberthy, looking for you, I fancy. Well, Dr. Penberthy, I've come, you see, to hear you make mincemeat of original sin."

"That's very open-minded of you," said Penberthy, with a rather strained smile. "I hope you are not hostile. We've no quarrel with the Church, you know, if she'll stick to her business and leave us to ours."

"My dear man, if you can cure sin with an injection, I shall be only too pleased. Only be sure you don't pump in something worse in the process. You

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know the parable of the swept and garnished house."

"I'll be as careful as I can," said Penberthy. "Excuse me one moment. I say, Wimsey, you've heard all about Lubbock's analysis, I suppose."

"Yes. Bit of a startler, isn't it?"

"It's going to make things damnably awkward for me, Wimsey. I wish to God you'd given me a hint at the time. Such a thing never once occurred to me."

"Why should it? You were expecting the old boy to pop off from heart, and he did pop off from heart. Nobody could possibly blame you."

"Couldn't they? That's all you know about juries. I wouldn't have had this happen, just at this moment, for a fortune. It couldn't have chosen a more unfortunate time."

"It'll blow over, Penberthy. That sort of mistake happens a hundred times a week. By the way, I gather I'm to congratulate you. When did this get settled? You've been very quiet about it."

"I was starting to tell you up at that infernal exhumation business, only somebody barged in. Yes. Thanks very much. We fixed it up—oh! about a fortnight or three weeks ago. You have met Naomi?"

"Only for a moment this evening. My friend Miss Phelps carried her off to hear all about you."

"Oh, yes. Well, you must come along and talk

to her. She's a sweet girl, and very intelligent. The old lady's a bit of a trial, I don't mind saying, but her heart's in the right place. And there's no doubt she gets hold of people whom it's very useful to meet."

"I didn't know you were such an authority on glands."

"I only wish I could afford to be. I've done a certain amount of experimental work under Professor Sligo. It's the Science of the Future, as they say in the press. There really isn't any doubt about that. It puts biology in quite a new light. We're on the verge of some really interesting discoveries, no doubt about it. Only what with the anti-vivisectors and the parsons and the other old women, one doesn't make the progress one ought. Oh, lord—they're waiting for me to begin. See you later."

"Half a jiff. I really came here—no, dash it, that's rude! But I'd no idea you were the lecturer till I spotted you. I originally came here (that sounds better) to get a look at Miss Dorland of Fentiman fame. But my trusty guide has abandoned me. Do you know Miss Dorland? Can you tell me which she is?"

"I know her to speak to. I haven't seen her this evening. She may not turn up, you know."

"I thought she was very keen on—on glands and things."

"I believe she is—or thinks she is. Anything does

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for these women, as long as it's new—especially if it's sexual. By the way, I don't intend to be sexual."

"Bless you for that. Well, possibly Miss Dorland will show up later."

"Perhaps. But—I say, Wimsey. She's in rather a queer position, isn't she? She may not feel inclined to face it. It's all in the papers, you know."

"Dash it, don't I know it? That inspired tippler, Salcombe Hardy, got hold of it somehow. I think he bribes the cemetery officials to give him advance news of exhumations. He's worth his weight in pound notes to the *Yell*. Cheerio! Speak your bit nicely. You don't mind if I'm not in the front row, do you? I always take up a strategic position near the door that leads to the grub."

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Penberthy's paper struck Wimsey as being original and well-delivered. The subject was not altogether unfamiliar to him, for Wimsey had a number of distinguished scientific friends who found him a good listener, but some of the experiments mentioned were new and the conclusions suggestive. True to his principles, Wimsey made a bolt for the supper-room, while polite hands were still applauding. He was not the first, however. A large figure in a hard-worked looking dress-suit was already engaged with a pile of savoury sandwiches and a whisky-and-soda. It turned at his approach and beamed at him from its liquid and inno-

cent blue eyes. Sally Hardy—never quite drunk and never quite sober—was on the job, as usual. He held out the sandwich-plate invitingly.

"Damn good, these are," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"What are you, if it comes to that?" asked Wimsey.

Hardy laid a fat hand on his sleeve.

"Two birds with one stone," he said, impressively. "Smart fellow, that Penberthy. Glands are news, you know. He knows it. He'll be one of these fashionable practitioners"—Sally repeated this phrase once or twice, as it seemed to have got mixed up with the soda—"before long. Doing us poor bloody journalists out of a job like . . . and . . ." (He mentioned two gentlemen whose signed contributions to popular dailies were a continual source of annoyance to the G.M.C.)

"Provided he doesn't damage his reputation over this Fentiman affair," rejoined Wimsey, in a refined shriek which did duty for a whisper amid the noisy stampede which had followed them up to the refreshment-table.

"Ah! there you are," said Hardy. "Penberthy's news in himself. He's a story, don't you see. We'll have to sit on the fence a bit, of course, till we see which way the cat jumps. I'll have a par. about it at the end, mentioning that he attended old Fentiman. Presently we'll be able to work up a little

thing on the magazine page about the advisability of a p.m. in all cases of sudden death. You know—even experienced doctors may be deceived. If he comes off very badly in cross-examination, there can be something about specialists not always being trustworthy—a kind word for the poor down-trodden G.P. and all that. Anyhow, he's worth a story. It doesn't matter what you say about him, provided you say something. You couldn't do us a little thing—about eight hundred words, could you—about rigor mortis or something? Only make it snappy."

"I could not," said Wimsey. "I haven't time and I don't want the money. Why should I? I'm not a dean or an actress."

"No, but you're news. You can give me the money, if you're so beastly flush. Look here, have you got a line on this case at all? That police friend of yours won't give anything away. I want to get something in before there's an arrest, because after that it's contempt. I suppose it's the girl you're after, isn't it? Can you tell me anything about her?"

"No—I came here to-night to get a look at her, but she hasn't turned up. I wish you could dig up her hideous past for me. The Rushworths must know something about her, I should think. She used to paint or something. Can't you get on to that?"

Hardy's face lighted up.

"Waffles Newton will probably know something," he said. "I'll see what I can dig out. Thanks very much, old man. That's given me an idea. We might get one of her pictures on the back pages. The old lady seems to have been a queer old soul. Odd will, wasn't it?"

"Oh, I can tell you all about that," said Wimsey. "I thought you probably knew."

He gave Hardy the history of Lady Dormer as he had heard it from Mr. Murbles. The journalist was enthralled.

"Great stuff!" he said. "That'll get 'em. Romance there! This'll be a scoop for the *Yell*. Excuse me. I want to 'phone it through to 'em before somebody else gets it. Don't hand it out to any of the other fellows."

"They can get it from Robert or George Fentiman," warned Wimsey.

"Not much, they won't," said Salcombe Hardy, feelingly. "Robert Fentiman gave old Barton of the *Banner* such a clip under the ear this morning that he had to go and see a dentist. And George has gone down to the Bellona, and they won't let anybody in. I'm all right on this. If there's anything I can do for you, I will, you bet. So long."

He faded away. A hand was laid on Peter's arm.

"You're neglecting me shockingly," said Marjorie Phelps. "And I'm frightfully hungry. I've

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been doing my best to find things out for you."

"That's top-hole of you. Look here. Come and sit out in the hall; it's quieter. I'll scrounge some grub and bring it along."

He secured a quantity of curious little stuffed buns, four *petits-fours*, some dubious claret-cup and some coffee and brought them with him on a tray, snatched while the waitress's back was turned.

"Thanks," said Marjorie, "I deserve all I can get for having talked to Naomi Rushworth. I cannot like that girl. She hints things."

"What, particularly?"

"Well, I started to ask about Ann Dorland. So she said she wasn't coming. So I said, 'Oh, why?' and she said, 'She *said* she wasn't well.'"

"Who said?"

"Naomi Rushworth said Ann Dorland said she couldn't come because she wasn't well. But she said that was only an excuse, of course."

"Who said?"

"Naomi said. So I said, was it? And she said yes, she didn't suppose she felt like facing people very much. So I said, 'I thought you were such friends.' So she said, 'Well, we are, but of course Ann always was a little abnormal, you see.' So I said that was the first I had heard of it. And she gave me one of her catty looks and said, 'Well, there was Ambrose Ledbury, wasn't there? But of course you had other

things to think of then, hadn't you?' The little beast. She meant Kowski. And after all, everybody knows how obvious she's made herself over this man Penberthy."

"I'm sorry, I've got mixed."

"Well, I was rather fond of Kowski. And I did almost promise to live with him, till I found that his last three women had all got fed up with him and left him, and I felt there must be something wrong with a man who continually got left, and I've discovered since that he was a dreadful bully when he dropped that touching lost-dog manner of his. So I was well out of it. Still, seeing that Naomi had been going about for the last year nearly, looking at Dr. Penberthy like a female spaniel that thinks it's going to be whipped, I can't see why she need throw Kowski in my face. And as for Ambrose Ledbury, anybody might have been mistaken in him."

"Who was Ambrose Ledbury?"

"Oh, he was the man who had that studio over Boulter's Mews. Powerfulness was his strong suit, and being above worldly considerations. He was rugged and wore homespun and painted craggy people in bedrooms, but his colour was amazing. He really could paint and so we could excuse a lot, but he was a professional heart-breaker. He used to gather people up hungrily in his great arms, you know—that's always rather irresistible. But he had

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no discrimination. It was just a habit, and his affairs never lasted long. But Ann Dorland was really rather overcome, you know. She tried the craggy style herself, but it wasn't at all her line—she hasn't any colour-sense, so there was nothing to make up for the bad drawing."

"I thought you said she didn't have any affairs."

"It wasn't an affair. I expect Ledbury gathered her up at some time or other when there wasn't anybody else handy, but he did demand good looks for anything serious. He went off to Poland a year ago with a woman called Natasha somebody. After that, Ann Dorland began to chuck painting. The trouble was, she took things seriously. A few little passions would have put her right, but she isn't the sort of person a man can enjoy flirting with. Heavy-handed. I don't think she would have gone on worrying about Ledbury if he hadn't happened to be the one and only episode. Because, as I say, she did make a few efforts, but she couldn't bring 'em off."

"I see."

"But that's no reason why Naomi should turn round like that. The fact is, the little brute's so proud of having landed a man—*and* an engagement ring—for herself, that she's out to patronize everybody else."

"Oh?"

"Yes; besides, everything is looked at from dear

Walter's point of view now, and naturally Walter isn't feeling very loving towards Ann Dorland."

"Why not?"

"My dear man, you're being very discreet, aren't you? Naturally, everybody's saying that she did it."

"Are they?"

"Who else could they think did it?"

Wimsey realized, indeed, that everybody must be thinking it. He was exceedingly inclined to think it himself.

"Probably that's why she didn't turn up."

"Of course it is. She's not a fool. She must know."

"That's true. Look here, will you do something for me? Something more, I mean?"

"What?"

"From what you say, it looks as though Miss Dorland might find herself rather short of friends in the near future. If she comes to you . . ."

"I'm not going to spy on her. Not if she had poisoned fifty old generals."

"I don't want you to. But I want you to keep an open mind, and tell me what you think. Because I don't want to make a mistake over this. And I'm prejudiced. I want Miss Dorland to be guilty. So I'm very likely to persuade myself she is when she isn't. See?"

"Why do you want her to be guilty?"

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"I oughtn't to have mentioned that. Of course, I don't want her found guilty if she isn't really."

"All right. I won't ask questions. And I'll try and see Ann. But I won't try to worm anything out of her. That's definite. I'm standing by Ann."

"My dear girl," said Wimsey, "you're not keeping an open mind. You think she did it."

Marjorie Phelps flushed.

"I don't. Why do you think that?"

"Because you're so anxious not to worm anything out of her. Worming couldn't hurt an innocent person."

"Peter Wimsey! You sit there, looking a perfectly well-bred imbecile, and then in the most underhand way you twist people into doing things they ought to blush for. No wonder you detect things. I will *not* do your worming for you!"

"Well, if you don't, I shall know your opinion, shan't I?"

The girl was silent for a moment. Then she said:

"It's all so beastly."

"Poisoning is a beastly crime, don't you think?" said Wimsey.

He got up quickly. Father Whittington was approaching, with Penberthy.

"Well," said Lord Peter, "have the altars reeled?"

"Dr. Penberthy has just informed me that they haven't a leg to stand on," replied the priest, smiling. "We have been spending a pleasant quarter of

an hour abolishing good and evil. Unhappily, I understand his dogma as little as he understands mine. But I exercised myself in Christian humility. I said I was willing to learn."

Penberthy laughed.

"You don't object, then, to my casting out devils with a syringe," he said, "when they have proved obdurate to prayer and fasting?"

"Not at all. Why should I? So long as they *are* cast out. And provided you are certain of your diagnosis."

Penberthy crimsoned and turned away sharply.

"Oh, lord!" said Wimsey. "That was a nasty one. From a Christian priest, too!"

"What have I said?" cried Father Whittington, much disconcerted.

"You have reminded Science," said Wimsey, "that only the Pope is infallible."

CHAPTER XVII

Parker Plays A Hand

"NOW, MRS. MITCHAM," SAID INSPECTOR PARKER, affably. He was always saying "Now, Mrs. Somebody," and he always remembered to say it affably. It was part of the routine.

The late Lady Dormer's housekeeper bowed frigidly, to indicate that she would submit to questioning.

"We want just to get the exact details of every little thing that happened to General Fentiman the day before he was found dead. I am sure you will help us. Do you recollect exactly what time he got here?"

"It would be round about a quarter to four—not later; I am sure I could not say exactly to the minute."

"Who let him in?"

"The footman."

"Did you see him then?"

"Yes; he was shown into the drawing-room, and I came down to him and brought him upstairs to her ladyship's bedroom."

"Miss Dorland did not see him then?"

"No; she was sitting with her ladyship. She sent her excuses by me, and begged General Fentiman to come up."

"Did the General seem quite well when you saw him?"

"So far as I could say he seemed well—always bearing in mind that he was a very old gentleman and had heard bad news."

"He was not bluish about the lips, or breathing very heavily, or anything of that kind?"

"Well, going up the stairs tried him rather."

"Yes, of course it would."

"He stood still on the landing for a few minutes to get his breath. I asked him whether he would like to take something, but he said no, he was all right."

"Ah! I daresay it would have been a good thing if he had accepted your very wise suggestion, Mrs. Mitcham."

"No doubt he knew best," replied the house-keeper, primly. She considered that in making observations the policeman was stepping out of his sphere.

"And then you showed him in. Did you witness the meeting between himself and Lady Dormer?"

"I did not" (emphatically). "Miss Dorland got up and said 'How do you do, General Fentiman?' and shook hands with him, and then I left the room, as it was my place to do."

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"Just so. Was Miss Dorland alone with Lady Dormer when General Fentiman was announced?"

"Oh, no—the nurse was there."

"The nurse—yes, of course. Did Miss Dorland and the nurse stay in the room all the time that the General was there?"

"No. Miss Dorland came out again in about five minutes and came downstairs. She came to me in the housekeeper's room, and she looked rather sad. She said, 'Poor old dears,'—just like that."

"Did she say any more?"

"She said: 'They quarrelled, Mrs. Mitcham, ages and ages ago, when they were quite young, and they've never seen each other since.' Of course, I was aware of that, having been with her ladyship all these years, and so was Miss Dorland."

"I expect it would seem very pitiful to a young lady like Miss Dorland?"

"No doubt; she is a young lady with feelings; not like some of those you see nowadays."

Parker wagged his head sympathetically.

"And then?"

"Then Miss Dorland went away again, after a little talk with me, and presently Nellie came in—that's the housemaid."

"How long after was that?"

"Oh, some time. I had just finished my cup of tea which I have at four o'clock. It would be about half past. She came to ask for some brandy for the

General, as he was feeling badly. The spirits are kept in my room, you see, and I have the key."

Parker showed nothing of his special interest in this piece of news.

"Did you see the General when you took the brandy?"

"I did not take it." Mrs. Mitcham's tone implied that fetching and carrying was not part of her duty. "I sent it by Nellie."

"I see. So you did not see the General again before he left?"

"No. Miss Dorland informed me later that he had had a heart attack."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Mitcham. Now I should like just to ask Nellie a few questions."

Mrs. Mitcham touched a bell. A fresh-faced, pleasant-looking girl appeared in answer.

"Nellie, this police-officer wants you to give him some information about that time General Fentiman came here. You must tell him what he wants to know, but remember he is busy and don't start your chattering. You can speak to Nellie here, officer."

And she sailed out.

"A bit stiff, isn't she?" murmured Parker, in an awestruck whisper.

"She's one of the old-fashioned sort, I don't mind saying," agreed Nellie with a laugh.

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"She put the wind up me. Now, Nellie—" he took up the old formula, "I hear you were sent to get some brandy for the old gentleman. Who told you about it?"

"Why, it was like this. After the General had been with Lady Dormer getting on for an hour, the bell rang in her ladyship's room. It was my business to answer that, so I went up, and Nurse Armstrong put her head out and said, 'Get me a drop of brandy, Nellie, quick, and ask Miss Dorland to come here. General Fentiman's rather unwell.' So I went for the brandy to Mrs. Mitcham, and on the way up with it, I knocked at the studio door where Miss Dorland was."

"Where's that, Nellie?"

"It's a big room on the first floor—built over the kitchen. It used to be a billiard-room in the old days, with a glass roof. That's where Miss Dorland does her painting and messing about with bottles and things, and she uses it as a sitting-room, too."

"Messing about with bottles?"

"Well, chemists' stuff and things. Ladies have to have their hobbies, you know, not having any work to do. It makes a lot to clear up."

"I'm sure it does. Well, go on, Nellie—I didn't mean to interrupt."

"Well, I gave Nurse Armstrong's message, and Miss Dorland said, 'Oh, dear, Nellie,' she said, 'poor old gentleman. It's been too much for him. Give me

the brandy, I'll take it along. And run along and get Dr. Penberthy on the telephone.' So I gave her the brandy and she took it upstairs."

"Half a moment. Did you see her take it upstairs?"

"Well, no, I don't think I actually saw her go up—but I thought she did. But I was going down to the telephone, so I didn't exactly notice."

"No—why should you?"

"I had to look Dr. Penberthy's number up in the book, of course. There was two numbers, and when I got his private house, they told me he was in Harley Street. While I was trying to get the second number Miss Dorland called over the stairs to me. She said 'Have you got the doctor, Nellie?' And I said, 'No, miss, not yet. The doctor's round in Harley Street.' And she said, 'Oh! well, when you get him, say General Fentiman's had a bad turn and he's coming round to see him at once.' So I said, 'Isn't the doctor to come here, miss?' And she said, 'No; the General's better now and he says he would rather go round there. Tell William to get a taxi.' So she went back, and just then I got through to the surgery and said to Dr. Penberthy's man to expect General Fentiman at once. And then he came downstairs with Miss Dorland and Nurse Armstrong holding on to him, and he looked mortal bad, poor old gentleman. William—the footman, you know, came in then and said he'd got the taxi,

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and he put General Fentiman into it, and then Miss Dorland and Nurse went upstairs again, and that was the end of it."

"I see. How long have you been here, Nellie?"

"Three years—sir." The "sir" was a concession to Parker's nice manners and educated way of speech. "Quite the gentleman," as Nellie remarked afterwards to Mrs. Mitcham, who replied, "No, Nellie—gentlemanlike I will not deny, but a policeman is a person, and I will trouble you to remember it."

"Three years? That's a long time as things go nowadays. Is it a comfortable place?"

"Not bad. There's Mrs. Mitcham, of course, but I know how to keep the right side of her. And the old lady—well, she was a real lady in every way."

"And Miss Dorland?"

"Oh, she gives no trouble, except clearing up after her. But she always speaks nicely and says please and thank you. I haven't any complaints."

"Modified rapture," thought Parker. Apparently Ann Dorland had not the knack of inspiring passionate devotion. "Not a very lively house, is it, for a young girl like yourself?"

"Dull as ditchwater," agreed Nellie, frankly. "Miss Dorland would have what they called studio parties sometimes, but not at all smart and nearly all young ladies—artists and such-like."

"And naturally it's been quieter still since Lady

Dormer died. Was Miss Dorland very much distressed at her death?"

Nellie hesitated.

"She was very sorry, of course; her ladyship was the only one she had in the world. And then she was worried with all this lawyer's business—something about the will, I expect you know, sir?"

"Yes, I know about that. Worried, was she?"

"Yes, and that angry—you wouldn't believe. There was one day Mr. Pritchard came, I remember particular, because I happened to be dusting the hall at the time, you see, and she was speaking that quick and loud I couldn't help hearing. 'I'll fight it for all I'm worth,' that was what she said and 'a . . . something—to defraud'—what would that be, now?"

"Plot?" suggested Parker.

"No—a—a conspiracy, that's it. A conspiracy to defraud. And then I didn't hear any more till Mr. Pritchard came out, and he said to her, 'Very well, Miss Dorland, we will make an independent inquiry.' And Miss Dorland looked so eager and angry, I was surprised. But it all seemed to wear off, like. She hasn't been the same person the last week or so."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, don't you notice it yourself, sir? She seems so quiet and almost frightened-like. As if

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she'd had a shock. And she cries a dreadful lot. She didn't do that at first."

"How long has she been so upset?"

"Well, I think it was when all this dreadful business came out about the poor old gentleman being murdered. It is awful, sir, isn't it? Do you think you'll catch the one as did it?"

"Oh, I expect so," said Parker, cheerfully. "That came as a shock to Miss Dorland, did it?"

"Well, I should say so. There was a little bit in the paper, you know, sir, about Sir James Lubbock having found out about the poisoning, and when I called Miss Dorland in the morning I took leave to point it out. I said, 'That's a funny thing, miss, isn't it, about General Fentiman being poisoned,' just like that, I said. And she said, 'Poisoned, Nellie? you must be mistaken'. So I showed her the bit in the paper and she looked just dreadful."

"Well, well," said Parker, "it's a very horrid thing to hear about a person one knows. Anybody would be upset."

"Yes, sir; me and Mrs. Mitcham was quite overcome. 'Poor old gentleman,' I said, 'whatever should anybody want to do him in for? He must have gone off his head and made away with himself,' I said. Do you think that was it, sir?"

"It's quite possible, of course," said Parker, genially.

"Cut up about his sister dying like that, don't

you think? That's what I said to Mrs. Mitcham. But she said a gentleman like General Fentiman wouldn't make away with himself and leave his affairs in confusion like he did. So I said, 'Was his affairs in confusion then?' and she said, 'They're not your affairs, Nellie, so you needn't be discussing them.' What do you think yourself, sir?"

"I don't think anything yet," said Parker, "but you have been very helpful. Now, would you kindly run and ask Miss Dorland if she could spare me a few minutes?"

Ann Dorland received him in the back drawing-room. He thought what an unattractive girl she was, with her sullen manner and gracelessness of form and movement. She sat huddled on one end of the sofa, in a black dress which made the worst of her sallow, blotched complexion. She had certainly been crying Parker thought, and when she spoke to him, it was curtly, in a voice roughened and hoarse and curiously lifeless.

"I am sorry to trouble you again," said Parker, politely.

"You can't help yourself, I suppose." She avoided his eye, and lit a fresh cigarette from the stump of the last.

"I just want to have any details you can give me about General Fentiman's visit to his sister. Mrs. Mitcham brought him up to her bedroom, I understand."

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She gave a sulky nod.

"You were there?"

She made no answer.

"Were you with Lady Dormer?" he insisted, rather more sharply.

"Yes."

"And the nurse was there too?"

"Yes."

She would not help him at all.

"What happened?"

"Nothing happened. I took him up to the bed and said, 'Auntie, here's General Fentiman.'"

"Lady Dormer was conscious, then?"

"Yes."

"Very weak, of course?"

"Yes."

"Did she say anything?"

"She said 'Arthur!' that's all. And he said, 'Felicity!' And I said, 'You'd like to be alone,' and went out."

"Leaving the nurse there?"

"I couldn't dictate to the nurse. She had to look after her patient."

"Quite so. Did she stay there throughout the interview?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Well," said Parker, patiently, "you can tell me this. When you went in with the brandy, the nurse was in the bedroom then?"

"Yes, she was."

"Now, about the brandy. Nellie brought that up to you in the studio, she tells me."

"Yes."

"Did she come into the studio?"

"I don't understand."

"Did she come right into the room, or did she knock at the door and did you come out to her on the landing?"

This roused the girl a little. "Decent servants don't knock at doors," she said, with a contemptuous rudeness; "she came in, of course."

"I beg your pardon," retorted Parker, stung. "I thought she might have knocked at the door of your private room."

"No."

"What did she say to you?"

"Can't you ask *her* all these questions?"

"I have done so. But servants are not always accurate; I should like your corroboration." Parker had himself in hand again now, and spoke pleasantly.

"She said that Nurse Armstrong had sent her for some brandy, because General Fentiman was feeling faint, and told her to call me. So I said she had better go and telephone Dr. Penberthy while I took the brandy."

All this was muttered hurriedly, and in such a

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low tone that the detective could hardly catch the words.

"And then did you take the brandy straight upstairs?"

"Yes, of course."

"Taking it straight out of Nellie's hands? Or did she put it down on the table or anywhere?"

"How the hell should I remember?"

Parker disliked a swearing woman, but he tried hard not to let this prejudice him.

"You can't remember—at any rate, you know you went straight on up with it? You didn't wait to do anything else?"

She seemed to pull herself together and make an effort to remember.

"If it's so important as that, I think I stopped to turn down something that was boiling."

"Boiling? On the fire?"

"On the gas-ring," she said, impatiently.

"What sort of thing."

"Oh, nothing—some stuff."

"Tea or cocoa, or something like that, do you mean?"

"No—some chemical things," she said, letting the words go reluctantly.

"Were you making chemical experiments?"

"Yes—I did a bit—just for fun—a hobby, you know—I don't do anything at it now. I took up the brandy——"

Her anxiety to shelve the subject of chemistry seemed to be conquering her reluctance to get on with the story.

"You were making chemical experiments—although Lady Dormer was so ill?" said Parker, severely.

"It was just to occupy my mind," she muttered.

"What was the experiment?"

"I don't remember."

"You can't remember at all?"

"NO!" she almost shouted at him.

"Never mind. You took the brandy upstairs?"

"Yes—at least, it isn't really upstairs. It's all on the same landing, only there are six steps up to Auntie's room. Nurse Armstrong met me at the door, and said 'He's better now,' and I went in and saw General Fentiman sitting in a chair, looking very queer and gray. He was behind a screen where Auntie couldn't see him, or it would have been a great shock to her. Nurse said, 'I've given him his drops and I think a little brandy will put him right again.' So we gave him the brandy—only a small dose, and after a bit, he got less deathly-looking and seemed to be breathing better. I told him we were sending for the doctor, and he said he'd rather go round to Harley Street. I thought it was rash, but Nurse Armstrong said he seemed really better, and it would be a mistake to worry him into doing what he didn't want. So I told Nellie to warn the

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doctor and send William for a taxi. General Fentiman seemed stronger then, so we helped him downstairs and he went off in the taxi."

Out of this spate of words, Parker fixed on the one thing he had not heard before.

"What drops were those the Nurse gave him?"

"His own. He had them in his pocket."

"Do you think she could possibly have given him too much? Was the quantity marked on the bottle?"

"I haven't the remotest idea. You'd better ask her."

"Yes, I shall want to see her, if you will kindly tell me where to find her."

"I've got the address upstairs. Is that all you want?"

"I should just like, if I may, to see Lady Dormer's room and the studio."

"What for?"

"It's just a matter of routine. We are under orders to see everything there is to see," replied Parker, reassuringly.

They went upstairs. A door on the first-floor landing immediately opposite the head of the staircase led into a pleasant, lofty room, with old-fashioned bedroom furniture in it.

"This is my aunt's room. She wasn't really my aunt, of course, but I called her so."

"Quite. Where does that second door lead to?"

"That's the dressing-room. Nurse Armstrong slept there while Auntie was ill."

Parker glanced in to the dressing-room, took in the arrangement of the bedroom and expressed himself satisfied.

She walked past him without acknowledgment while he held the door open. She was a sturdily-built girl, but moved with a languor distressing to watch—slouching, almost aggressively unalluring.

"You want to see the studio?"

"Please."

She led the way down the six steps and along a short passage to the room which, as Parker already knew, was built out at the back over the kitchen premises. He mentally calculated the distance as he went.

The studio was large and well-lit by its glass roof. One end was furnished like a sitting-room; the other was left bare, and devoted to what Nellie called "mess." A very ugly picture (in Parker's opinion) stood on an easel. Other canvases were stacked round the walls. In one corner was a table covered with American cloth, on which stood a gas-ring, protected by a tin plate, and a Bunsen burner.

"I'll look up that address," said Miss Dorland, indifferently, "I've got it here somewhere."

She began to rummage in an untidy desk. Parker

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strolled up to the business end of the room, and explored it with eyes, nose and fingers.

The ugly picture on the easel was newly-painted; the smell told him that, and the dabs of paint on the palette were still soft and sticky. Work had been done there within the last two days, he was sure. The brushes had been stuck at random into a small pot of turpentine. He lifted them out; they were still clogged with paint. The picture itself was a landscape, he thought, roughly drawn and hot and restless in colour. Parker was no judge of art; he would have liked to get Wimsey's opinion. He explored further. The table with the Bunsen burner was bare, but in a cupboard close by he discovered a quantity of chemical apparatus of the kind he remembered using at school. Everything had been tidily washed and stacked away. Nellie's job, he imagined. There were a number of simple and familiar chemical substances in jars and packages, occupying a couple of shelves. They would probably have to be analyzed, he thought, to see if they were all they seemed. And what useless nonsense it all was, he thought to himself; anything suspicious would obviously have been destroyed weeks before. Still, there it was. A book in several volumes on the top shelf caught his attention: it was Quain's Dictionary of Medicine. He took down a volume in which he noticed a paper mark. Opening it at the marked place, his eye fell upon the

words: "Rigor mortis," and, a little later on—"action of certain poisons." He was about to read more, when he heard Miss Dorland's voice just behind him.

"That's all nothing," she said, "I don't do any of that muck now. It was just a passing craze. I paint, really. What do you think of this?" She indicated the unpleasant landscape.

Parker said it was very good.

"Are these your work, too?" he asked, indicating the other canvases.

"Yes," she said.

He turned a few of them to the light, noticing at the same time how dusty they were. Nellie had scamped this bit of the work—or perhaps had been told not to touch. Miss Dorland showed a trifle more animation than she had done hitherto, while displaying her works. Landscape seemed to be rather a new departure; most of the canvases were figure-studies. Mr. Parker thought that, on the whole, the artist had done wisely to turn to landscape. He was not well acquainted with the modern school of thought in painting, and had difficulty in expressing his opinion of these curious figures, with their faces like eggs and their limbs like rubber.

"That is the Judgment of Paris," said Miss Dorland.

"Oh, yes," said Parker. "And this?"

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"Oh, just a study of a woman dressing. It's not very good. I think this portrait of Mrs. Mitcham is rather decent, though."

Parker stared aghast; it might possibly be a symbolic representation of Mrs. Mitcham's character, for it was very hard and spiky; but it looked more like a Dutch doll, with its triangular nose, like a sharp-edged block of wood, and its eyes mere dots in an expanse of liver-coloured cheek.

"It's not very like her," he said, doubtfully.

"It's not meant to be."

"This seems better—I mean, I like this better," said Parker, turning the next picture up hurriedly.

"Oh, that's nothing—just a fancy head."

Evidently this picture—the head of a rather cadaverous man, with a sinister smile and a slight cast in the eye—was despised—a Philistine backsliding, almost like a human being. It was put away, and Parker tried to concentrate his attention on a "Madonna and Child" which, to Parker's simple evangelical mind, seemed an abominable blasphemy.

Happily, Miss Dorland soon wearied, even of her paintings, and flung them all back into the corner.

"D'you want anything else?" she demanded abruptly. "Here's that address."

Parker took it.

"Just one more question," he said, looking her hard in the eyes. "Before Lady Dormer died—

before General Fentiman came to see her—did you know what provision she had made for you and for him in her will?”

The girl stared back at him, and he saw panic come into her eyes. It seemed to flow all over her like a wave. She clenched her hands at her sides, and her miserable eyes dropped beneath his gaze, shifting as though looking for a way out.

“Well?” said Parker.

“No!” she said. “No! of course not. Why should I?” Then, surprisingly, a dull crimson flush flooded her sallow cheeks and ebbed away, leaving her looking like death.

“Go away,” she said, furiously, “you make me sick.”

CHAPTER XVIII

Picture-cards

"SO I'VE PUT A MAN IN AND HAD ALL THE THINGS in that cupboard taken away for examination," said Parker.

Lord Peter shook his head.

"I wish I had been there," he said, "I should have liked to see those paintings. However——"

"They might have conveyed something to you," said Parker, "you're artistic. You can come along and look at them any time, of course. But it's the time factor that's worrying me, you know. Supposing she gave the old boy digitalin in his B and S, why should it wait all that time before working? According to the books, it ought to have popped him off in about an hour's time. It was a biggish dose, according to Lubbock."

"I know. I think you're up against a snag there. That's why I should have liked to see the pictures."

Parker considered this apparent *non sequitur* for a few moments and gave it up.

"George Fentiman——" he began.

"Yes," said Wimsey, "George Fentiman. I must be getting emotional in my old age, Charles, for I

have an unconquerable dislike to examining the question of George Fentiman's opportunities."

"Bar Robert," pursued Parker, ruthlessly, "he was the last interested person to see General Fentiman."

"Yes—by the way, we have only Robert's unsupported word for what happened in that last interview between him and the old man."

"Come, Wimsey—you're not going to pretend that Robert had any interest in his grandfather's dying before Lady Dormer. On the contrary."

"No—but he might have had some interest in his dying before he made a will. Those notes on that bit of paper. The larger share was to go to George. That doesn't entirely agree with what Robert said. And if there was no will, Robert stood to get everything."

"So he did. But by killing the General then, he made sure of getting nothing at all."

"That's the awkwardness. Unless he thought Lady Dormer was already dead. But I don't see how he could have thought that. Or unless——"

"Well?"

"Unless he gave his grandfather a pill or something to be taken at some future time, and the old boy took it too soon by mistake."

"That idea of a delayed-action pill is the most tiresome thing about this case. It makes almost anything possible."

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"Including, of course, the theory of its being given to him by Miss Dorland."

"That's what I'm going to interview the nurse about, the minute I can get hold of her. But we've got away from George."

"You're right. Let's face George. I don't want to, though. Like the lady in Maeterlinck who's running round the table while her husband tries to polish her off with a hatchet, I am not gay. George is the nearest in point of time. In fact he fits very well in point of time. He parted from General Fentiman at about half-past six, and Robert found Fentiman dead at about eight o'clock. So allowing that the stuff was given in a pill——"

"Which it would have to be, in a taxi," interjected Parker.

"As you say—in a pill, which would take a bit longer to get working than the same stuff taken in solution—why then the General might quite well have been able to get to the Bellona and see Robert before collapsing."

"Very nice. But how did George get the drug?"

"I know, that's the first difficulty."

"And how did he happen to have it on him just at that time? He couldn't possibly have known that General Fentiman would run across him just at that moment. Even if he'd known of his being at Lady Dormer's, he couldn't be expecting him to go from there to Harley Street."

"He might have been carrying the stuff about with him, waiting for a good opportunity to use it. And when the old man called him up and started jawing him about his conduct and all that, he thought he'd better do the job quick, before he was cut out of the will."

"Um!—but why should George be such a fool, then, as to admit he'd never heard about Lady Dormer's will? If he had heard of it, we couldn't possibly suspect him. He'd only to say the General told him about it in the taxi."

"I suppose it hadn't struck him in that light."

"Then George is a bigger ass than I took him for."

"Possibly he is," said Parker, dryly. "At any rate, I have put a man on to make inquiries at his home."

"Oh! have you? I say, do you know, I wish I'd left this case alone. What the deuce did it matter if old Fentiman was pushed painlessly off a bit before his time? He was simply indecently ancient."

"We'll see if you say that in sixty years' time," said Parker.

"By that time we shall, I hope, be moving in different circles. I shall be in the one devoted to murderers and you in the much lower and hotter one devoted for those who tempt others to murder them. I wash my hands of this case, Charles. There's nothing for me to do now you have come into it."

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It bores and annoys me. Let's talk about something else."

Wimsey might wash his hands, but, like Pontius Pilate, he found society irrationally determined to connect him with an irritating and unsatisfactory case.

At midnight, the telephone bell rang.

He had just gone to bed, and cursed it.

"Tell them I'm out," he shouted to Bunter, and cursed again on hearing the man assure the unknown caller that he would see whether his lordship had returned. Disobedience in Bunter spelt urgent necessity.

"Well?"

"It is Mrs. George Fentiman, my lord; she appears to be in great distress. If your lordship wasn't in I was to beg you to communicate with her as soon as you arrived."

"Punk! they're not on the 'phone."

"No, my lord."

"Did she say what the matter was?"

"She began by asking if Mr. George Fentiman was here, my lord."

"Oh, hades!"

Bunter advanced gently with his master's dressing-gown and slippers. Wimsey thrust himself into them savagely and padded away to the telephone.

"Hullo!"

"Is that Lord Peter?—Oh, *good!*" The line

sighed with relief—a harsh sound, like a death-rattle. “Do you know where George is?”

“No idea. Hasn’t he come home?”

“No—and I’m frightened. Some people were here this morning . . .”

“The police.”

“Yes . . . George . . . they found something . . . I can’t say it all over the ’phone . . . but George went off to Walmisley-Hubbard’s with the car . . . and they say he never came back there . . . and . . . you remember that time he was so funny before . . . and got lost . . .”

“Your six minutes are up,” boomed the voice of the Exchange, “will you have another call?”

“Yes, please . . . oh, don’t cut us off . . . wait . . . oh! I haven’t any more pennies . . . Lord Peter . . .”

“I’ll come round at once,” said Wimsey, with a groan.

“Oh, thank you—thank you so much!”

“I say—where’s Robert?”

“Your six minutes are up,” said the voice, finally, and the line went dead with a metallic crash.

“Get me my clothes,” said Wimsey, bitterly—“give me those loathsome and despicable rags which I hoped to have put off forever. Get me a taxi. Get me a drink. Macbeth has murdered sleep. Oh! and get me Robert Fentiman, first.”

Major Fentiman was not in town, said Wood-

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ward. He had gone back to Richmond again. Wimsey tried to get through to Richmond. After a long time, a female voice, choked with sleep and fury, replied. Major Fentiman had not come home. Major Fentiman kept very late hours. Would she give Major Fentiman a message when he did come in? Indeed she would not. She had other things to do than to stay up all night answering telephone calls and giving messages to Major Fentiman. This was the second time that night, and she had told the other party that she could not be responsible for telling Major Fentiman this, that and the other. Would she leave a note for Major Fentiman, asking him to go round to his brother's house at once? Well now, was it reasonable to expect her to sit up on a bitter cold night writing letters? Of course not, but this was a case of urgent illness. It would be a very great kindness. Just that—to go round to his brother's house and say the call came from Lord Peter Wimsey.

"Who?"

"Lord Peter Wimsey."

"Very well, sir. I beg your pardon if I was a bit short, but really——"

"You weren't, you snobby old cat, you were infernally long," breathed his lordship inaudibly. He thanked her, and rang off.

Sheila Fentiman was anxiously waiting for him on the doorstep, so that he was saved the embarrass-

ment of trying to remember which was the right number of rings to give. She clasped his hand eagerly as she drew him in.

"Oh! it is good of you. I'm so worried. I say, don't make a noise, will you? They complain, you know." She spoke in a harassed whisper.

"Blast them, let them complain," said Wimsey, cheerfully. "Why shouldn't you make a row when George is upset? Besides, if we whisper, they'll think we're no better than we ought to be. Now, my child, what's all this? You're as cold as a *pêche Melba*. That won't do. Fire half out—where's the whisky?"

"Hush! I'm all right, really. George——"

"You're not all right. Nor am I. As George Robey says, this getting up from my warm bed and going into the cold night air doesn't suit me." He flung a generous shovelful of coals on the fire and thrust the poker between the bars. "And you've had no grub. No wonder you're feeling awful."

Two places were set at the table—untouched—waiting for George. Wimsey plunged into the kitchen premises, followed by Sheila uttering agitated remonstrances. He found some disagreeable remnants—a watery stew, cold and sodden; a basin half-full of some kind of tinned soup; a chill suet pudding put away on a shelf.

"Does your woman cook for you? I suppose she does, as you're both out all day. Well, she can't

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cook, my child. No matter, here's some Bovril—she can't have hurt that. You go and sit down and I'll make you some."

"Mrs. Munns——"

"Blow Mrs. Munns!"

"But I must tell you about George."

He looked at her, and decided that she really must tell him about George.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bully. One has an ancestral idea that women must be treated like imbeciles in a crisis. Centuries of the 'women-and-children-first' idea, I suppose. Poor devils!"

"Who, the women?"

"Yes. No wonder they sometimes lose their heads. Pushed into corners, told nothing of what's happening and made to sit quiet and do nothing. Strong men would go dotty in the circs. I suppose that's why we've always grabbed the privilege of rushing about and doing the heroic bits."

"That's quite true. Give me the kettle."

"No, no, I'll do that. You sit down and—I mean, sorry, *take* the kettle. Fill it, light the gas, put it on. And tell me about George."

The trouble, it seemed, had begun at breakfast. Ever since the story of the murder had come out, George had been very nervy and jumpy, and, to Sheila's horror, had "started muttering again." "Muttering," Wimsey remembered, had formerly been the prelude to one of George's "queer fits."

These had been a form of shell-shock, and they had generally ended in his going off and wandering about in a distraught manner for several days, sometimes with partial and occasionally with complete temporary loss of memory. There was the time when he had been found dancing naked in a field among a flock of sheep, and singing to them. It had been the more ludicrously painful in that George was altogether tone-deaf, so that his singing, though loud, was like a hoarse and rumbling wind in the chimney. Then there was a dreadful time when George had deliberately walked into a bonfire. That was when they had been staying down in the country. George had been badly burnt, and the shock of the pain had brought him round. He never remembered afterwards why he had tried to do these things, and had only the faintest recollection of having done them at all. The next vagary might be even more disconcerting.

At any rate, George had been "muttering."

They were at breakfast that morning, when they saw two men coming up the path. Sheila, who sat opposite the window, saw them first, and said carelessly: "Hullo! who are these? They look like plain-clothes policemen." George took one look, jumped up and rushed out of the room. She called to him to know what was the matter, but he did not answer, and she heard him "rummaging" in the back room, which was the bedroom. She was going

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to him, when she heard Mr. Munns open the door to the policemen and then heard them inquiring for George. Mr. Munns ushered them into the front room with a grim face on which "police" seemed written in capital letters. George——

At this point the kettle boiled. Sheila was taking it off the stove to make the Bovril, when Wimsey became aware of a hand on his coat-collar. He looked round into the face of a gentleman who appeared not to have shaved for several days.

"Now then," said this apparition, "what's the meaning of this?"

"Which," added an indignant voice from the door, "I thought as there was something behind all this talk of the Captain being missing. You didn't expect him to be missing, I suppose, ma'am. Oh, dear no! Nor your gentleman friend, neither, sneaking up in a taxi and you waiting at the door so's Munns and me shouldn't hear. But I'd have you know this is a respectable house, Lord Knows Who or whatever you call yourself—more likely one of these low-down confidence fellers, I expect, if the truth was known. With a monocle too, like that man we was reading about in the News of the World. And in my kitchen too, and drinking my Bovril in the middle of the night, the impudence! Not to speak of the goings-in-and-out all day, banging the front door, and that was the police come here this morning, you think I didn't know?"

Up to something, that's what they've been, the pair of them, and the captain as he says he is but that's as may be, I daresay he had his reasons for clearing off, and the sooner you goes after him my fine madam, the better I'll be pleased, I can tell you."

"That's right," said Mr. Munns—"ow!"

Lord Peter had removed the intrusive hand from his collar with a sharp jerk which appeared to cause anguish out of all proportion to the force used.

"I'm glad you've come along," he said. "In fact, I was just going to give you a call. Have you anything to drink in the house, by the way?"

"Drink?" cried Mrs. Munns on a high note, "the impudence! And if I see you, Joe, giving drinks to thieves and worse in the middle of the night in my kitchen, you'll get a piece of my mind. Coming in here as bold as brass, and the captain run away, and asking for drink——"

"Because," said Wimsey, fingering his note-case, "the public houses in this law-abiding neighbourhood are of course closed. Otherwise a bottle of Scotch——"

Mr. Munns appeared to hesitate.

"Call yourself a man!" said Mrs. Munns.

"Of course," said Mr. Munns, "if I was to go in a friendly manner to Jimmy Rowe at the Dragon, and ask him to give me a bottle of Johnny Walker as a friend to a friend, and provided no money was to pass between him and me, that is——"

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"A good idea," said Wimsey, cordially.

Mrs. Munns gave a loud shriek.

"The ladies," said Mr. Munns, "gets nervous at times." He shrugged his shoulders.

"I daresay a drop of Scotch wouldn't do Mrs. Munns's nerves any harm," said Wimsey.

"If you dare, Joe Munns," said the landlady, "if you dare to go out at this time of night, hobnobbing with Jimmy Rowe and making a fool of yourself with burglars and such——"

Mr. Munns executed a sudden volte-face.

"You shut up!" he shouted. "Always sticking your face in where you aren't wanted."

"Are you speaking to me?"

"Yes. Shut up!"

Mrs. Munns sat down suddenly on a kitchen chair and began to sniff.

"I'll just hop round to the Dragon now, sir," said Mr. Munns, "before old Jimmy goes to bed. And then we'll go into this here."

He departed. Possibly he forgot what he had said about no money passing, for he certainly took the note which Wimsey absent-mindedly held out to him.

"Your drink's getting cold," said Wimsey to Sheila.

She came across to him.

"Can't we get rid of these people?"

"In half a jiff. It's no good having a row with

them. I'd do it like a shot, only, you see, you've got to stay on here for a bit, in case George comes back."

"Of course. I'm sorry for all this upset, Mrs. Munns," she added, a little stiffly, "but I'm so worried about my husband."

"Husband?" snorted Mrs. Munns. "A lot husbands are to worry about. Look at that Joe. Off he goes to the Dragon, never mind what I say to him. They're dirt, that's what husbands are, the whole pack of them. And I don't care what anybody says."

"Are they?" said Wimsey. "Well, I'm not one—yet—so you needn't mind what you say to me."

"It's the same thing," said the lady, viciously, "husbands and parricides, there's not a half-penny to choose between them. Only parricides aren't respectable—but then, they're easier got rid of."

"Oh!" replied Wimsey, "but I'm not a parricide either—not Mrs. Fentiman's parricide at any rate, I assure you. Hullo! here's Joe. Did you get the doings, old man? You did? Good work. Now, Mrs. Munns, have just a spot with us. You'll feel all the better for it. And why shouldn't we go into the sitting-room where it's warmer?"

Mrs. Munns complied. "Oh, well," she said, "here's friends all round. But you'll allow it all looked a bit queer, now, didn't it? And the police

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this morning, asking all those questions, and emptying the dust-bin all over the backyard."

"Whatever did they want with the dust-bin?"

"Lord knows; and that Cummins woman looking on all the time over the wall. I can tell you, I was vexed. 'Why, Mrs. Munns,' she said, 'have you been poisoning people?' she said. 'I always told you,' she said, 'your cooking 'ud do for somebody one of these days.' The nasty cat."

"What a rotten thing to say," said Wimsey, sympathetically. "Just jealousy, I expect. But what did the police find in the dust-bin?"

"Find? Them find anything? I should like to see them finding things in my dust-bin. The less I see of their interfering ways the better I'm pleased. I told them so. I said, 'If you want to come upsetting my dust-bin,' I said, 'you'll have to come with a search-warrant,' I said. That's the law and they couldn't deny it. They said Mrs. Fentiman had given them leave to look, so I told them Mrs. Fentiman had no leave to give them. It was my dust-bin, I told them, not hers. So they went off with a flea in their ear."

"That's the stuff to give 'em, Mrs. Munns."

"Not but what I'm respectable. If the police come to me in a right and lawful manner, I'll gladly give them any help they want. I don't want to get into trouble, not for any number of captains. But interference with a free-born woman

and no search-warrant I will *not* stand. And they can either come to me in a fitting way or they can go and whistle for their bottle."

"What bottle?" asked Wimsey, quickly.

"The bottle they were looking for in my dust-bin, what the captain put there after breakfast."

Sheila gave a faint cry.

"What bottle was that, Mrs. Munns?"

"One of them little tablet bottles," said Mrs. Munns, "same as you have standing on the wash-hand stand, Mrs. Fentiman. When I saw the Captain smashing it up in the yard with a poker——"

"There now, Primrose," said Mr. Munns, "can't you see as Mrs. Fentiman ain't well?"

"I'm quite all right," said Sheila, hastily, pushing away the hair which clung damply to her forehead. "What was my husband doing?"

"I saw him," said Mrs. Munns, "run out into the back yard—just after your breakfast it was, because I recollect Munns was letting the officers into the house at the time. Not that I knew then who it was, for, if you will excuse me mentioning of it, I was in the outside lavatory, and that was how I come to see the Captain. Which ordinarily, you can't see the dust-bin from the house, my lord I should say, I suppose, if you really are one, but you meet so many bad characters nowadays that one can't be too careful—on account of the lavatory standing out as you may say and hiding it."

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"Just so," said Wimsey.

"So when I saw the captain breaking the bottle as I said, and throwing the bits into the dust-bin, 'Hullo!' I said, 'that's funny,' and I went to see what it was and I put it in an envelope, thinking, you see, as it might be something poisonous, and the cat such a dreadful thief as he is, I never can keep him out of that dust-bin. And when I came in, I found the police here. So after a bit, I found them poking about in the yard and I asked them what they were doing there. Such a mess as they'd made, you never would believe. So they showed me a little cap they'd found, same as it might be off that tablet bottle. 'Did I know where the rest of it was?' they said. And I said, what business had they got with the dust-bin at all. So they said——"

"Yes, I know," said Wimsey. "I think you acted very sensibly, Mrs. Munns. And what did you do with the envelope and things?"

"I kept it," replied Mrs. Munns, nodding her head, "I kept it. Because, you see, if they *did* return *with* a warrant and I'd destroyed that bottle, where should I be?"

"Quite right," said Wimsey, with his eye on Sheila.

"Always keep on the right side of the law," agreed Mr. Munns, "and nobody can't interfere with you. That's what I say. I'm a Conservative, I

am. I don't hold with these Socialist games. Have another."

"Not just now," said Wimsey. "And we really must not keep you and Mrs. Munns up any longer. But, look here! You see, Captain Fentiman had shell-shock after the War, and he is liable to do these little odd things at times—break things up, I mean, and lose his memory and go wandering about. So Mrs. Fentiman is naturally anxious about his not having turned up this evening."

"Ay," said Mr. Munns, with relish, "I knew a fellow like that. Went clean off his rocker he did one night. Smashed up his family with a beetle—a paviour he was by profession, and that's how he came to have a beetle in the house—pounded 'em to a jelly, he did, his wife and five little children, and went off and drowned himself in the Regent's Canal. And, what's more, when they got him out, he didn't remember a word about it, not one word. So they sent him to—what's that place? Dartmoor? no, Broadmoor, that's it, where Ronnie True went to with his little toys and all."

"Shut up, you fool," said Wimsey, savagely.

"Haven't you got feelings?" demanded his wife.

Sheila got up, and made a blind effort in the direction of the door.

"Come and lie down," said Wimsey, "you're worn out. Hullo! there's Robert, I expect. I left

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a message for him to come round as soon as he got home."

Mr. Munns went to answer the bell.

"We'd better get her to bed as quick as possible," said Wimsey to the landlady. "Have you got such a thing as a hot-water bottle?"

Mrs. Munns departed to fetch one, and Sheila caught Wimsey's hand.

"Can't you get hold of that bottle? Make her give it you. You can. You can do anything. Make her."

"Better not," said Wimsey. "Look suspicious. Look here, Sheila, what *is* the bottle?"

"My heart medicine. I missed it. It's something to do with digitalin."

"Oh, lord," said Wimsey, as Robert came in.

.

"It's all pretty damnable," said Robert.

He thumped the fire gloomily; it was burning badly, the lower bars were choked with the ashes of a day and night.

"I've been having a talk with Frobisher," he added. "All this talk in the Club—and the papers—naturally he couldn't overlook it."

"Was he decent?"

"Very decent. But of course I couldn't explain the thing. I'm sending in my papers."

Wimsey nodded. Colonel Frobisher could scarcely

overlook an attempted fraud—not after things had been said in the papers.

“If I’d only let the old man alone. Too late now. He’d have been buried. Nobody would have asked questions.”

“I didn’t *want* to interfere,” said Wimsey, defending himself against the unspoken reproach.

“Oh, I know. I’m not blaming you. People . . . money oughtn’t to depend on people’s deaths . . . old people, with no use for their lives . . . it’s a devil of a temptation. Look here, Wimsey, what are we to do about this woman?”

“The Munns female?”

“Yes. It’s the devil and all she should have got hold of the stuff. If they find out what it’s supposed to be, we shall be blackmailed for the rest of our lives.”

“No,” said Wimsey, “I’m sorry, old man, but the police have got to know about it.”

Robert sprang to his feet.

“My God!—you wouldn’t——”

“Sit down, Fentiman. Yes, I must. Don’t you see I must? We can’t suppress things. It always means trouble. It’s not even as though they hadn’t got their eye on us already. They’re suspicious——”

“Yes, and why?” burst out Robert, violently. “Who put it into their heads? . . . For God’s sake don’t start talking about law and justice! Law and justice! You’d sell your best friend for the sake of

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making a sensational appearance in the witness-box, you infernal little police spy!"

"Chuck that, Fentiman!"

"I'll not chuck it! You'd go and give away a man to the police—when you know perfectly well he isn't responsible—just because you can't afford to be mixed up in anything unpleasant. I know you. Nothing's too dirty for you to meddle in, provided you can pose as the pious little friend of justice. You make me sick!"

"I tried to keep out of this——"

"You tried!—don't be a blasted hypocrite! You get out of it now, and stay out—do you hear?"

"Yes, but listen a moment——"

"Get out!" said Robert.

Wimsey stood up.

"I know how you feel, Fentiman——"

"Don't stand there being righteous and forbearing, you sickening prig. For the last time—are you going to shut up, or are you going to trot round to your policeman friend and earn the thanks of a grateful country for splitting on George? Get on! Which is it to be?"

"You won't do George any good——"

"Never mind that. Are you going to hold your tongue?"

"Be reasonable, Fentiman."

"Reasonable be damned. Are you going to the police? No shuffling. Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"You dirty little squirt," said Robert, striking out passionately. Wimsey's return blow caught him neatly on the chin and landed him in the waste-paper basket.

"And now, look here," said Wimsey, standing over him, hat and stick in hand. "It's no odds to me what you do or say. You think your brother murdered your grandfather. I don't know whether he did or not. But the worst thing you can do for him is to try and destroy evidence. And the worst thing you can possibly do for his wife is to make her a party to anything of the sort. And next time you try to smash anybody's face in, remember to cover up your chin. That's all. I can let myself out. Good-bye."

.

He went round to 12 Great Ormond Street and routed Parker out of bed.

Parker listened thoughtfully to what he had to say.

"I wish we'd stopped Fentiman before he bolted," he said.

"Yes; why didn't you?"

"Well, Dykes seems to have muffed it rather. I wasn't there myself. But everything seemed all right. Fentiman looked a bit nervy, but many people do when they're interviewed by the police—think of their hideous pasts, I suppose, and won-

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der what's coming next. Or else it's just stage-fright. He stuck to the same tale he told you—said he was quite sure the old General hadn't taken any pills or anything in the taxi—didn't attempt to pretend he knew anything about Lady Dormer's will. There was nothing to detain him for. He said he had to get to his job in Great Portland Street. So they let him go. Dykes sent a man to follow him up, and he went along to Hubbard-Walmisley's all right. Dykes said, might he just have a look round the place before he went, and Mrs. Fentiman said certainly. He didn't expect to find anything, really. Just happened to step into the back-yard, and saw a bit of broken glass. He then had a look round, and there was the cap of the tablet-bottle in the dust-bin. Well, then, of course, he started to get interested, and was just having a hunt through for the rest of it, when old mother Munns appeared and said the dust-bin was her property. So they had to clear out. But Dykes oughtn't to have let Fentiman go till they'd finished going over the place. He 'phoned through to Hubbard-Walmisley's at once, and heard that Fentiman had arrived and immediately gone out with the car, to visit a prospective customer in Herts. The fellow who was supposed to be trailing Fentiman got carburetor trouble just beyond St. Albans, and by the time he was fixed, he'd lost Fentiman."

"Did Fentiman go to the customer's house?"

"Not he. Disappeared completely. We shall find the car, of course—it's only a matter of time."

"Yes," said Wimsey. His voice sounded tired and constrained.

"This alters the look of things a bit," said Parker, "doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"What have you done to your face, old man?"

Wimsey glanced at the looking-glass, and saw that an angry red flush had come up on the cheek-bone.

"Had a bit of a dust-up with Robert," he said.

"Oh!"

Parker was aware of a thin veil of hostility, drawn between himself and the friend he valued. He knew that for the first time, Wimsey was seeing him as the police. Wimsey was ashamed and his shame made Parker ashamed too.

"You'd better have some breakfast," said Parker. His voice sounded awkward to himself.

"No—no thanks, old man. I'll go home and get a bath and shave."

"Oh, right-oh!"

There was a pause.

"Well, I'd better be going," said Wimsey.

"Oh, yes," said Parker again. "Right-oh!"

"Er—cheerio!" said Wimsey at the door.

"Cheerio!" said Parker.

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The bedroom door shut. The flat-door shut. The front-door shut.

Parker pulled the telephone towards him and called up Scotland Yard.

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The atmosphere of his own office was bracing to Parker when he got down there. For one thing, he was taken aside by a friend and congratulated in conspiratorial whispers.

"Your promotion's gone through," said the friend. "Dead certainty. The Chief's no end pleased. Between you and me, of course. But you've got your Chief-Inspectorship all right. Damn good."

Then, at ten o'clock, the news came through that the missing Walmisley-Hubbard had turned up. It had been abandoned in a remote Hertfordshire lane. It was in perfectly good order, the gear-lever in neutral and the tank full of petrol. Evidently, Fentiman had left it and wandered away somewhere, but he could not be far off. Parker made the necessary arrangements for combing out the neighbourhood. The bustle and occupation soothed his mind. Guilty or insane or both, George Fentiman had to be found; it was just a job to be done.

The man who had been sent to interview Mrs. Munns (armed this time with a warrant) returned with the fragments of the bottle and tablets.

Parker duly passed these along to the police analyst. One of the detectives who was shadowing Miss Dorland rang up to announce that a young woman had come to see her, and that the two had then come out carrying a suit-case and driven away in a taxi. Maddison, the other detective, was following them. Parker said, "All right; stay where you are for the present," and considered this new development. The telephone rang again. He thought it would be Maddison, but it was Wimsey—a determinedly brisk and cheerful Wimsey this time.

"I say, Charles. I want something."

"What?"

"I want to go and see Miss Dorland."

"You can't. She's gone off somewhere. My man hasn't reported yet."

"Oh! Well, never mind her. What I really want to see is her studio."

"Yes? Well, there's no reason why you shouldn't."

"Will they let me in?"

"Probably not. I'll meet you there and take you in with me. I was going out any way. I've got to interview the nurse. We've just got hold of her."

"Thanks awfully. Sure you can spare the time?"

"Yes. I'd like your opinion."

"I'm glad somebody wants it. I'm beginning to feel like a pelican in the wilderness."

"Rot! I'll be round in ten minutes."

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"Of course," explained Parker, as he ushered Wimsey into the studio, "we've taken away all the chemicals and things. There's not much to look at, really."

"Well, you can deal best with all that. It's the books and paintings I want to look at. H'm! Books, you know, Charles, are like lobster-shells. We surround ourselves with 'em, and then we grow out of 'em and leave 'em behind, as evidences of our earlier stages of development."

"That's a fact," said Parker. "I've got rows of school-boy stuff at home—never touch it now, of course. And W. J. Locke—read everything he wrote once upon a time. And Le Queux, and Conan Doyle, and all that stuff."

"And now you read theology. And what else?"

"Well, I read Hardy a good bit. And when I'm not too tired, I have a go at Henry James."

"The refined self-examinations of the infinitely-sophisticated. 'M-m. Well now. Let's start with the shelves by the fireplace. Dorothy Richardson—Virginia Woolf—E. B. C. Jones—May Sinclair—Katherine Mansfield—the modern female writers are well represented, aren't they? Galsworthy. Yes. No J. D. Beresford—no Wells—no Bennett. Dear me, quite a row of D. H. Lawrence. I wonder if she reads him very often."

He pulled down "Women in Love" at random, and slapped the pages open and shut.

"Not kept very well dusted, are they? But they have 'been read. Compton Mackenzie—Storm Jameson—yes—I see."

"The medical stuff is over here."

"Oh!—a few text-books—first steps in chemistry. What's that tumbled down at the back of the book-case? Louis Berman, eh? *The Personal Equation*. And here's *Why We Behave Like Human Beings*. And Julian Huxley's essays. A determined effort at self-education here, what?"

"Girls seem to go in for that sort of thing nowadays."

"Yes—hardly nice, is it? Hullo!"

"What?"

"Over here by the couch. This represents the latest of our lobster-shells, I fancy. Austin Freeman, Austin Freeman, Austin Freeman—bless me! she must have ordered him in wholesale. *Through the Wall*—that's a good 'tec story, Charles—all about the third degree—Isabel Ostrander—three Edgar Wallaces—the girl's been indulging in an orgy of crime!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Parker, with emphasis. "That fellow Freeman is full of plots about poisonings and wills and survivorship, isn't he?"

"Yes"—Wimsey balanced *A Silent Witness* gently in his hand, and laid it down again. "This one, for instance, is all about a bloke who murdered somebody and kept him in cold storage till

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he was ready to dispose of him. It would suit Robert Fentiman."

Parker grinned.

"A bit elaborate for the ordinary criminal. But I daresay people do get ideas out of these books. Like to look at the pictures? They're pretty awful."

"Don't try to break it gently. Show us the worst at once. . . . Oh, lord!"

"Well, it gives *me* a pain," said Parker. "But I thought perhaps that was my lack of artistic education."

"It was your natural good taste. What vile colour, and viler drawing."

"But nobody cares about drawing nowadays, do they?"

"Ah! but there's a difference between the man who can draw and won't draw, and the man who can't draw at all. Go on. Let's see the rest."

Parker produced them, one after the other. Wimsey glanced quickly at each. He had picked up the brush and palette and was fingering them as he talked.

"These," he said, "are the paintings of a completely untalented person, who is, moreover, trying to copy the mannerisms of a very advanced school. By the way, you have noticed, of course, that she has been painting within the last few days, but chucked it in sudden disgust. She has left the paints on the palette, and the brushes are still stuck

in the turps, turning their ends up and generally ruining themselves. Suggestive, I fancy. The—stop a minute! Let's look at that again."

Parker had brought forward the head of the sallow, squinting man which he had mentioned to Wimsey before.

"Put that up on the easel. That's very interesting. The others, you see, are all an effort to imitate other people's art, but this—this is an effort to imitate nature. Why?—it's very bad, but it's meant for somebody. And it's been worked on a lot. Now what was it made her do that?"

"Well, it wasn't for his beauty, I should think."

"No?—but there must have been a reason. Dante, you may remember, once painted an angel. Do you know the limerick about the old man of Khartoum?"

"What did he do?"

"He kept two black sheep in his room. They remind me (he said) Of two friends who are dead, But I cannot remember of whom."

"If that reminds you of anybody you know, I don't care much for your friends. I never saw an uglier mug."

"He's not beautiful. But I think the sinister squint is chiefly due to bad drawing. It's very difficult to get eyes looking the same way, when you can't draw. Cover up one eye, Charles—not yours, the portrait's."

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Parker did so.

Wimsey looked again, and shook his head.

"It escapes me for the moment," he said. "Probably it's nobody I know after all. But, whoever it is, surely this room tells you something."

"It suggests to me," said Parker, "that the girl's been taking more interest in crimes and chemistry stuff than is altogether healthy in the circumstances."

Wimsey looked at him for a moment.

"I wish I could think as you do."

"What *do* you think?" demanded Parker, impatiently.

"No," said Wimsey. "I told you about that George business this morning, because glass bottles are facts, and one mustn't conceal facts. But I'm not obliged to tell you what I think."

"You don't think, then, that Ann Dorland did the murder?"

"I don't know about that, Charles. I came here hoping that this room would tell me the same thing that it told you. But it hasn't. It's told me different. It's told me what I thought all along."

"A penny for your thoughts, then," said Parker, trying desperately to keep the conversation on a jocular footing.

"Not even thirty pieces of silver," replied Wimsey, mournfully.

Parker stacked the canvasses away without another word.

CHAPTER XIX

Lord Peter Plays Dummy

"DO YOU WANT TO COME WITH ME TO THE Armstrong woman?"

"May as well," said Wimsey, "you never know."

Nurse Armstrong belonged to an expensive nursing home in Great Wimpole Street. She had not been interviewed before, having only returned the previous evening from escorting an invalid lady to Italy. She was a large, good-looking, imperturbable woman, rather like the Venus of Milo, and she answered Parker's questions in a cheerful, matter-of-fact tone, as though they had been about bandages or temperatures.

"Oh, yes, constable; I remember the poor old gentleman being brought in, perfectly."

Parker had a natural dislike to being called constable. However, a detective must not let little things like that irritate him.

"Was Miss Dorland present at the interview between your patient and her brother?"

"Only for a few moments. She said good after-

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noon to the old gentleman and led him up to the bed, and then, when she saw them comfortable together, she went out."

"How do you mean, comfortable together?"

"Well, the patient called the old gentleman by his name, and he answered, and then he took her hand and said, 'I'm sorry, Felicity; forgive me,' or something of that sort, and she said, 'There's nothing to forgive; don't distress yourself, Arthur,'—crying, he was, the poor old man. So he sat down on the chair by the bed, and Miss Dorland went out."

"Nothing was said about the will?"

"Not while Miss Dorland was in the room, if that's what you mean."

"Suppose anybody had listened at the door afterwards—could they have heard what was said?"

"Oh, no! The patient was very weak and spoke very low. I couldn't hear myself half she said."

"Where were you?"

"Well, I went away, because I thought they'd like to be alone. But I was in my own room with the door open between, and I was looking in most of the time. She was so ill, you see, and the old gentleman looked so frail, I didn't like to go out of earshot. In our work, you see, we often have to see and hear a lot that we don't say anything about."

"Of course, Nurse—I am sure you did quite

right. Now when Miss Dorland brought the brandy up—the General was feeling very ill?”

“Yes—he had a nasty turn. I put him in the big chair and bent him over till the spasm went off. He asked for his own medicine, and I gave it to him—no, it wasn’t drops—it was amyl nitrate; you inhale it. Then I rang the bell and sent the girl for the brandy.”

“Amyl nitrate—you’re sure that’s all he had?”

“Positive; there wasn’t anything else. Lady Dormer had been having strychnine injections to keep her heart going, of course, and we’d tried oxygen; but we shouldn’t give him those, you know.”

She smiled, competently, condescendingly.

“Now, you say Lady Dormer had been having this, that and the other. Were there any medicines lying about that General Fentiman might have accidentally taken up and swallowed?”

“Oh, dear no.”

“No drops or tabloids or anything of that kind?”

“Certainly not; the medicines were kept in my room.”

“Nothing on the bedside table or the mantelpiece?”

“There was a cup of diluted Listerine by the bed, for washing out the patient’s mouth from time to time, that was all.”

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"And there's no digitalin in Listerine—no, of course not. Well now, who brought up the brandy-and-water?"

"The housemaid went to Mrs. Mitcham for it. I should have had some upstairs, as a matter of fact, but the patient couldn't keep it down. Some of them can't, you know."

"Did the girl bring it straight up to you?"

"No—she stopped to call Miss Dorland on the way. Of course, she ought to have brought the brandy at once and gone to Miss Dorland afterwards—but it's anything to save trouble with these girls, as I daresay you know."

"Did Miss Dorland bring it straight up—?" began Parker. Nurse Armstrong broke in upon him.

"If you're thinking, did she put the digitalin into the brandy, you can dismiss that from your mind, constable. If he'd had as big a dose as that in solution at half past four, he'd have been taken ill ever so much earlier than he was."

"You seem to be well up in the case, Nurse."

"Oh, I am. Naturally I was interested, Lady Dormer being my patient and all."

"Of course. But all the same, *did* Miss Dorland bring the brandy straight along to you?"

"I think so. I heard Nellie go along the passage on the half landing, and looked out to call to her, but by the time I'd got the door open, I saw Miss

Dorland coming out of the studio with the brandy in her hand."

"And where was Nellie then?"

"Just got back to the end of the passage and starting downstairs to the telephone."

"At that rate, Miss Dorland couldn't have been more than ten seconds alone with the brandy," said Peter, thoughtfully. "And who gave it to General Fentiman?"

"I did. I took it out of Miss Dorland's hand at the door and gave it to him at once. He seemed better then, and only took a little of it."

"Did you leave him again?"

"I did not. Miss Dorland went out on to the landing presently to see if the taxi was coming."

"She was never alone with him?"

"Not for a moment."

"Did you like Miss Dorland, Nurse? Is she a nice girl, I mean?" Wimsey had not spoken for so long that Parker quite started.

"She was always very pleasant to me," said Nurse Armstrong. "I shouldn't call her an attractive girl, not to my mind."

"Did she ever mention Lady Dormer's testamentary arrangements in your hearing?" asked Parker, picking up what he conceived to be Wimsey's train of thought.

"Well—not exactly. But I remember her once talking about her painting, and saying she did it

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for a hobby, as her aunt would see she always had enough to live on."

"That's true enough," said Parker. "At the worst, she would get fifteen thousand pounds, which carefully invested, might mean six or seven hundred a year. She didn't say she expected to be very rich?"

"No."

"Nor anything about the General?"

"Not a word."

"Was she happy?" asked Wimsey.

"She was upset, naturally, with her aunt being so ill."

"I don't mean that. You are the sort of person who observes a lot—nurses are awfully quick about that kind of thing, I've noticed. Did she strike you as a person who—who felt right with life, as you might say?"

"She was one of the quiet ones. But—yes—I should say she was satisfied with things all right."

"Did she sleep well?"

"Oh, she was a very sound sleeper. It was a job to wake her if anything was wanted in the night."

"Did she cry much?"

"She cried over the old lady's death; she had very nice feelings."

"Some natural tears she shed, and all that. She didn't lie about and have awful howling fits or anything like that?"

"Good gracious, no!"

"How did she walk?"

"Walk?"

"Yes, walk. Was she what you'd call droopy?"

"Oh, no—quick and brisk."

"What was her voice like?"

"Well, now, that was one of the nice things about her. Rather deep for a woman, but with what I might call a tune in it. Melodious," said Nurse Armstrong, with a faint giggle, "that's what they call it in novels."

Parker opened his mouth and shut it again.

"How long did you stay on at the house after Lady Dormer died?" pursued Wimsey.

"I waited on till after the funeral, just in case Miss Dorland should need anybody."

"Before you left, did you hear anything of this trouble about the lawyers and the wills?"

"They were talking about it downstairs. Miss Dorland said nothing to me herself."

"Did she seem worried?"

"Not to notice."

"Had she any friends with her at the time?"

"Not staying in the house. She went out to see some friends one evening, I think—the evening before I left. She didn't say who they were."

"I see. Thank you, Nurse."

Parker had no more questions to put, and they took their leave.

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"Well," said Parker, "how anybody could admire that girl's voice——"

"You noticed that! My theory is coming out right, Charles. I wish it wasn't. I'd *rather* be wrong. I should like to have you look pitifully at me and say, 'I told you so.' I can't speak more strongly than that."

"Hang your theories!" said Parker. "It looks to me as if we shall have to wash out the idea that General Fentiman got his dose in Portman Square. By the way, didn't you say you'd met the Dorland girl at the Rushworths?"

"No. I said I went hoping to meet her, but she wasn't there."

"Oh, I see. Well, that'll do for the moment. How about a spot of lunch?"

At which point they turned the corner and ran slap into Salcombe Hardy, emerging from Harley Street. Wimsey clutched Parker's arm suddenly. "I've remembered," he said.

"What?"

"Who that portrait reminds me of. Tell you later."

Sally, it appeared, was also thinking of grub. He was, in fact, due to meet Waffles Newton at the Falstaff. It ended in their all going to the Falstaff.

"And how's it all going?" demanded Sally, ordering boiled beef and carrots.

He looked limpidly at Parker, who shook his head.

"Discreet man, your friend," said Sally to Peter. "I suppose the police are engaged in following up a clew—or have we reached the point when they are completely baffled? Or do we say that an arrest is imminent, eh?"

"Tell us your own version, Sally. Your opinion's as good as anybody's."

"Oh, mine!—Same as yours—same as everybody's. The girl was in league with the doctor, of course. Pretty obvious, isn't it?"

"Maybe," said Parker, cautiously. "But that's a hard thing to prove. We know, of course, that they both sometimes went to Mrs. Rushworth's house, but there's no evidence that they knew each other well."

"But, you ass, she—" Wimsey blurted out. He shut his mouth again with a snap. "No, I won't. Fish it out for yourselves."

Illumination was flooding in on him in great waves. Each point of light touched off a myriad others. Now a date was lit up, and now a sentence. The relief in his mind would have been overwhelming, had it not been for that nagging central uncertainty. It was the portrait that worried him most. Painted as a record, painted to recall beloved features—thrust face to the wall and covered with dust.

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Sally and Parker were talking.

"... moral certainty is not the same thing as proof."

"Unless we can show that she knew the terms of the will. . . ."

"... why wait till the last minute? It could have been done safely any time. . . ."

"They probably thought it wasn't necessary. The old lady looked like seeing him into his grave easily. If it hadn't been for the pneumonia."

"Even so, they had five days."

"Yes—well, say she didn't know till the very day of Lady Dormer's death. . . ."

"She might have told her then. Explained . . . seeing the thing had become a probability. . . ."

"And the Dorland girl arranged for the visit to Harley Street. . . ."

"... plain as the nose on your face."

Hardy chuckled.

"They must have got a thundering shock when the body turned up the next morning at the Bellona. I suppose you gave Penberthy a good grueling about that rigor."

"Pretty fair. He fell back on professional caution, naturally."

"It's coming to him in the witness-box. Does he admit knowing the girl?"

"He says he just knows her to speak to. But one's got to find somebody who has seen them together."

You remember the Thompson case. It was the interview in the tea-shop that clinched it."

"What I want to know," said Wimsey, "is why——"

"Why what?"

"Why didn't they compromise?" It was not what he had been going to say, but he felt defeated, and those words would end the sentence as well as any others.

"What's that?" asked Hardy, quickly.

Peter explained.

"When the question of survivorship came up, the Fentimans were ready to compromise and split the money. Why didn't Miss Dorland agree? If your idea is the right one, it was much the safest way. But it was she who insisted on an inquiry."

"I didn't know that," said Hardy. He was annoyed. All kinds of "stories" were coming his way to-day, and to-morrow there would probably be an arrest, and he wouldn't be able to use them.

"They *did* agree to compromise in the end," said Parker. "When was that?"

"After I told Penberthy there was going to be an exhumation," said Wimsey, as though in spite of himself.

"There you are! They saw it was getting too dangerous."

"Do you remember how nervous Penberthy was at the exhumation?" said Parker. "That man—

what's his name's—joke about Palmer, and knocking over the jar?"

"What was that?" demanded Hardy again. Parker told him, and he listened, grinding his teeth. Another good story gone west. But it would all come out at the trial, and would be worth a headline.

"Robert Fentiman ought to be given a medal," said Hardy. "If he hadn't gone butting in——"

"Robert Fentiman?" inquired Parker, distantly. Hardy grinned.

"If he didn't fix up the old boy's body, who did? Give us credit for a little intelligence."

"One admits nothing," said Parker, "but——"

"But everybody says he did it. Leave it at that. Somebody did it. If Somebody hadn't butted in, it would have been jam for the Dorland."

"Well, yes. Old Fentiman would just have gone home and pegged out quietly—and Penberthy would have given the certificate."

"I'd like to know how many inconvenient people are polished off that way. Damn it—it's so easy."

"I wonder how Penberthy's share of the boodle was to be transferred to him."

"I don't," said Hardy. "Look here—here's this girl. Calls herself an artist. Paints bad pictures. Right. Then she meets this doctor fellow. He's mad on glands. Shrewd man—knows there's money in glands. *She* starts taking up glands. Why?"

"That was a year ago."

"Precisely. Penberthy isn't a rich man. Retired Army surgeon, with a brass plate and a consulting-room in Harley Street—shares the house with two other hard-up brass-platers. Lives on a few old dodderers down at the Bellona. Has an idea, if only he could start one of these clinics for rejuvenating people, he could be a millionaire. All these giddy old goats who want their gay time over again—why, they're a perfect fortune to the man with a bit of capital and a hell of a lot of cheek. Then this girl comes along—rich old woman's heiress—and he goes after her. It's all fixed up. He's to accommodate her by removing the obstacle to the fortune, and she obligingly responds by putting the money into his clinic. In order not to make it too obvious, she has to pretend to get a dickens of an interest in glands. So she drops painting and takes to medicine. What could be clearer?"

"But that means," put in Wimsey, "that she must have known all about the will at least a year ago."

"Why not?"

"Well that brings us back to the old question: Why the delay?"

"And it gives us the answer," said Parker. "They waited till the interest in the glands and things was so firmly established and recognized by everybody

that nobody would connect it with the General's death."

"Of course," said Wimsey. He felt that matters were rushing past him at a bewildering rate. But George was safe, anyhow.

"How soon do you think you'll be able to take action?" asked Hardy. "I suppose you'll want a bit more solid proof before you actually arrest them."

"I'd have to be certain that they don't wriggle out of it," said Parker, slowly. "It's not enough to prove that they were acquainted. There may be letters, of course, when we go over the girl's things. Or Penberthy's—though he's hardly the man to leave compromising documents lying about."

"You haven't detained Miss Dorland?"

"No; we've let her loose—on a string. I don't mind telling you one thing. There's been no communication of any kind with Penberthy."

"Of course there hasn't," said Wimsey. "They've quarreled."

The others stared at him.

"How do you know that?" demanded Parker, annoyed.

"Oh, well—it doesn't matter—I *think* so, that's all. And any way, they would take jolly good care not to communicate, once the alarm was given."

"Hullo!" broke in Hardy, "here's Waffles. Late again. Waffles!—what *have* you been doing, old boy?"

"Interviewing the Rushworths," said Waffles, edging his way into a chair by Hardy. He was a thin, sandy person, with a tired manner. Hardy introduced him to Wimsey and Parker.

"Got your story in?"

"Oh, yes. Awful lot of cats these women are. Ma Rushworth—she's the sloppy sort of woman with her head in the clouds all the time, who never sees anything till it's stuck right under her nose—she pretends, of course, that she always thought Ann Dorland was an unwholesome kind of girl. I nearly asked why, in that case, she had her about the house; but I didn't. Anyway, Mrs. Rushworth said, they didn't know her very intimately. They wouldn't, of course. Wonderful how these soulful people sheer off at the least suggestion of unpleasantness."

"Did you get anything about Penberthy?"

"Oh, yes—I got something."

"Good?"

"Oh, yes."

Hardy, with Fleet Street's delicate reticence towards the man with an exclusive story, did not press the question. The talk turned back and went over the old ground. Waffles Newton agreed with Salcombe Hardy's theory.

"The Rushworths must surely know something. Not the mother, perhaps—but the girl. If she's engaged to Penberthy, she'll have noticed any other

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woman who seemed to have an understanding with him. Women see these things."

"You don't suppose that they're going to confess that dear Dr. Penberthy ever had an understanding with anybody but dear Naomi," retorted Newton. "Besides, they aren't such fools as not to know that Penberthy's connection with the Dorland girl must be smothered up at all costs. They know she did it, all right, but they aren't going to compromise him."

"Of course not," said Parker, rather shortly. "The mother probably knows nothing, anyway. It's a different matter if we get the girl in the witness-box——"

"You won't," said Waffles Newton. "At least, you'll have to be jolly quick."

"Why?"

Newton waved an apologetic hand.

"They're being married to-morrow," he said, "special license. I say, that's not to go further, Sally."

"That's all right, old man."

"Married?" said Parker. "Good lord! that forces our hand a bit. Perhaps I'd better pop off. So long—and thanks very much for the tip, old man."

Wimsey followed him into the street.

"We'll have to put the stopper on this marriage business, quick," said Parker, madly waving to a taxi, which swooped past and ignored him. "I

didn't want to move just at present, because I wasn't ready, but it'll be the devil and all if the Rushworth girl gets hitched up to Penberthy and we can't take her evidence. Devil of it is, if she's determined to go on with it, we can't stop it without arresting Penberthy. Very dangerous, when there's no real proof. I think we'd better have him down to the Yard for interrogation and detain him."

"Yes," said Wimsey. "But—look here, Charles."

A taxi drew up.

"What?" said Parker, sharply, with his foot on the step. "I can't wait, old man. What is it?"

"I—look here, Charles—this is all wrong," pleaded Wimsey. "You may have got the right solution, but the working of the sum's all wrong. Same as mine used to be at school, when I'd looked up the answer in the crib and had to fudge in the middle part. I've been a fool. I ought to have known about Penberthy. But I don't believe this story about bribing and corrupting him, and getting him to do the murder. It doesn't fit."

"Doesn't fit what?"

"Doesn't fit the portrait. Or the books. Or the way Nurse Armstrong described Ann Dorland. Or your description of her. It's a mechanically perfect explanation, but I swear it's all wrong."

"If it's mechanically perfect," said Parker, "that's good enough. It's far more than most

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explanations are. You've got that portrait on the brain. It's because you're artistic, I suppose."

For some reason, the word "artistic" produces the most alarming reactions in people who know anything about art.

"Artistic be damned!" said Wimsey, spluttering with fury, "it's because I'm an ordinary person, and have met women, and talked to them like ordinary human beings——"

"You and your women," said Parker, rudely.

"Well—I and my women, what about it? One learns something. You're on the wrong tack about this girl."

"I've met her and you haven't," objected Parker. "Unless you're suppressing something. You keep on hinting things. Anyhow, I've met the girl, and she impressed me as being guilty."

"And I haven't met her, and I'll swear she isn't guilty."

"You must know, of course."

"I do happen to know about this."

"I'm afraid your unsupported opinion will hardly be sufficient to refute the weight of evidence."

"You haven't any real evidence, if it comes to that. You don't know that they were ever alone together; you don't know that Ann Dorland knew about the will; you can't prove that Penberthy administered the poison——"

Lord Peter Plays Dummy

"I don't despair of getting all the evidence necessary," said Parker, coldly, "provided you don't keep me here *all* day." He slammed the taxi-door.

"What a beast of a case this is," thought Wimsey. "That makes two silly, sordid rows to-day. Well, what next?" He considered a moment.

"My spirit needs soothing," he decided. "Feminine society is indicated. Virtuous feminine society. No emotions. I'll go and have tea with Marjorie Phelps."

CHAPTER XX

Ann Dorland Goes Misere

THE STUDIO DOOR WAS OPENED BY A GIRL HE DID not know. She was not tall, but compactly and generously built. He noticed the wide shoulders and the strong swing of the thighs before he had taken in her face. The uncurtained window behind her threw her features into shadow, he was only aware of thick black hair, cut in a square bob, with a bang across the forehead.

"Miss Phelps is out."

"Oh!—will she be long?"

"Don't know. She'll be in to supper."

"Do you think I might come in and wait?"

"I expect so, if you're a friend of hers."

The girl fell back from the doorway and let him pass. He laid his hat and stick on the table and turned to her. She took no notice of him, but walked over to the fireplace and stood with one hand on the mantelpiece. Unable to sit down, since she was still standing, Wimsey moved to the modeling-board, and raised the wet cloth that covered the little mound of clay.

He was gazing with an assumption of great interest at the half-modeled figure of an old flower-seller, when the girl said:

"I say!"

She had taken up Marjorie Phelps' figurine of himself, and was twisting it over in her fingers.

"Is this you?"

"Yes—rather good of me, don't you think?"

"What do you want?"

"Want?"

"You've come here to have a look at me, haven't you?"

"I came to see Miss Phelps."

"I suppose the policeman at the corner comes to see Miss Phelps too."

Wimsey glanced out of the window. There *was* a man at the corner—an elaborately indifferent loungee.

"I am sorry," said Wimsey, with sudden enlightenment. "I'm really awfully sorry to seem so stupid, and so intrusive. But honestly, I had no idea who you were till this moment."

"Hadn't you? Oh, well, it doesn't matter."

"Shall I go?"

"You can please yourself."

"If you really mean that, Miss Dorland, I should like to stay. I've been wanting to meet you, you know."

"That was nice of you," she mocked. "First you

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wanted to defraud me, and now you're trying to——"

"To what?"

She shrugged her wide shoulders.

"Yours is not a pleasant hobby, Lord Peter Wimsey."

"Will you believe me," said Wimsey, "when I assure you that I was never a party to the fraud. In fact, I showed it up. I did, really."

"Oh, well. It doesn't matter now."

"But do please believe that."

"Very well. If you say so, I must believe it."

She threw herself on the couch near the fire.

"That's better," said Wimsey. "Napoleon or somebody said that you could always turn a tragedy into a comedy, by sittin' down. Perfectly true, isn't it? Let's talk 'bout something ordinary till Miss Phelps comes in. Shall we?"

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Oh, well—that's rather embarrassin'. Books." He waved a vague hand. "What have you been readin' lately?"

"Nothing much."

"Don't know what I should do without books. Fact, I always wonder what people did in the old days. Just think of it. All sorts of bothers goin' on—matrimonial rows and love-affairs—prodigal sons and servants and worries—and no books to turn to."

"People worked with their hands instead."

"Yes—that's frightfully jolly for the people who can do it. I envy them myself. You paint, don't you?"

"I try to."

"Portraits?"

"Oh, no—figure and landscape chiefly."

"Oh! . . . A friend of mine—well, it's no use disguising it—he's a detective—you've met him, I think . . ."

"That man? Oh, yes. Quite a polite sort of detective."

"He told me he'd seen some stuff of yours. It rather surprised him, I think. He's not exactly a modernist. He seemed to think your portraits were your best work."

"There weren't many portraits. A few figure-studies . . ."

"They worried him a bit." Wimsey laughed. "The only thing he understood, he said, was a man's head in oils. . . ."

"Oh, that!—just an experiment—a fancy thing. My best stuff is some sketches I did of the Wiltshire Downs a year or two ago. Direct painting, without any preliminary sketch."

She described a number of these works.

"They sound ever so jolly," said Wimsey. "Great stuff. I wish I could do something of that kind. As

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I say, I have to fall back on books for my escape. Reading *is* an escape to me. Is it to you?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well—it is to most people, I think. Servants and factory hands read about beautiful girls loved by dark, handsome men, all covered over with jewels and moving in scenes of gilded splendour. And passionate spinsters read Ethel M. Dell. And dull men in offices read detective stories. They wouldn't, if murder and police entered into their lives."

"I don't know," she said. "When Crippen and Le Neve were taken on the steamer, they were reading Edgar Wallace." Her voice was losing its dull harshness; she sounded almost interested.

"Le Neve was reading it," said Wimsey, "but I've never believed she knew about the murder. I think she was fighting desperately to know nothing about it—reading horrors, and persuading herself that nothing of that kind had happened, or could happen, to her. I think one might do that, don't you?"

"I don't know," said Ann Dorland. "Of course, a detective story keeps your brain occupied. Rather like chess. Do you play chess?"

"No good at it. I like it—but I keep on thinking about the history of the various pieces, and the picturesqueness of the moves. So I get beaten. I'm not a player."

"Nor am I. I wish I were."

"Yes—that would keep one's mind off things with a vengeance. Draughts or dominoes or patience would be even better. No connection with anything. I remember," added Wimsey, "one time when something perfectly grinding and hateful had happened to me. I played patience all day. I was in a nursing home—with shell-shock—and other things. I only played one game, the very simplest . . . the demon . . . a silly game with no ideas in it at all. I just went on laying it out and gathering it up . . . hundred times in an evening . . . so as to stop thinking."

"Then you too . . ."

Wimsey waited; but she did not finish the sentence.

"It's a kind of drug, of course. That's an awfully trite thing to say, but it's quite true."

"Yes, quite."

"I read detective stories too. They were about the only thing I could read. All the others had the war in them—or love . . . or some damn thing I didn't want to think about."

She moved restlessly.

"You've been through it, haven't you?" said Wimsey, gently.

"Me? . . . well . . . all this . . . it isn't pleasant, you know . . . the police . . . and . . . and everything."

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"You're not really worried about the police, are you?"

She had cause to be, if she only knew it, but he buried this knowledge at the bottom of his mind, defying it to show itself.

"Everything's pretty hateful, isn't it?"

"Something's hurt you . . . all right . . . don't talk about it if you don't want to . . . a man?"

"It usually is a man, isn't it?"

Her eyes were turned away from him, and she answered with a kind of shamefaced defiance.

"Practically always," said Wimsey. "Fortunately, one gets over it."

"Depends what it is."

"One gets over everything," repeated Wimsey, firmly. "Particularly if one tells somebody about it."

"One can't always tell things."

"I can't imagine anything really untellable."

"Some things are so beastly."

"Oh, yes—quite a lot of things. Birth is beastly—and death—and digestion, if it comes to that. Sometimes when I think of what's happening inside me to a beautiful *suprême de sole*, with the caviare in boats, and the *croûtons* and the jolly little twists of potato and all the gadgets—I could cry. But there it is, don't you know."

Ann Dorland suddenly laughed.

"That's better," said Wimsey. "Look here, you've

been brooding over this and you're seeing it all out of proportion. Let's be practical and frightfully ordinary. Is it a baby?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well—that's rather a good thing, because babies, though no doubt excellent in their way, take a long time and come expensive. Is it blackmail?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"Good. Because blackmail is even longer and more expensive than babies. Is it Freudian, or sadistic, or any of those popular modern amusements?"

"I don't believe you'd turn a hair if it was."

"Why should I?—I can't think of anything worse to suggest, except what Rose Macaulay refers to as 'nameless orgies.' Or diseases, of course. It's not leprosy or anything?"

"What a mind you've got," she said, beginning to laugh. "No, it isn't leprosy."

"Well, what *did* the blighter do?"

Ann Dorland smiled faintly: "It's nothing, really."

"If only Heaven prevents Marjorie Phelps from coming in," thought Wimsey, "I'm going to get it now . . . It must have been something, to upset you like this," he pursued aloud, "you're not the kind of woman to be upset about nothing."

"You don't think I am?" She got up and faced

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him squarely. "He said . . . he said . . . I imagined things . . . he said . . . he said I had a mania about sex. I suppose you would call it Freudian, really," she added hastily, flushing an ugly crimson.

"Is that all?" said Wimsey. "I know plenty of people who would take that as a compliment . . . But obviously you don't. What exact form of mania did he suggest . . .?"

"Oh, the gibbering sort that hangs round church doors for curates," she broke out, fiercely. "It's a lie. He did—he *did*—pretend to—want me and all that. The beast! . . . I can't tell you the things he said . . . and I'd made such a fool of myself. . . ."

She was back on the couch, crying, with large, ugly, streaming tears, and snorting into the cushions. Wimsey sat down beside her.

"Poor kid," he said. This, then, was at the back of Marjorie's mysterious hints, and those scratch-cat sneers of Naomi Rushworth's. The girl had wanted love-affairs, that was certain; imagined them perhaps. There had been Ambrose Ledbury. Between the normal and the abnormal, the gulf is deep, but so narrow that misrepresentation is made easy.

"Look here." He put a comforting arm round Ann's heaving shoulders. "This fellow—was it Penberthy, by the way?"

"How did you know?"

"Oh!—the portrait, and lots of things. The things you liked once, and then wanted to hide away and forget. He's a rotter, anyway, for saying that kind of thing—even if it was true, which it isn't. You got to know him at the Rushworth's, I take it—when?"

"Nearly two years ago."

"Were you keen on him then?"

"No. I—well, I was keen on somebody else. Only that was a mistake too. He—he was one of those people, you know."

"They can't help themselves," said Wimsey, soothingly. "When did the change-over happen?"

"The other man went away. And later on, Dr. Penberthy—oh! I don't know! He walked home with me once or twice, and then he asked me to dine with him—in Soho."

"Had you at that time told any one about this comic will of Lady Dormer's?"

"Of course not. How could I? I never knew anything about it till after she died."

Her surprise sounded genuine enough.

"What did you think? Did you think the money would come to you?"

"I knew that some of it would; Auntie told me she would see me provided for."

"There were the grandsons, of course."

"Yes; I thought she would leave most of it to

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them. It's a pity she didn't, poor dear. Then there wouldn't have been all this dreadful bother."

"People so often seem to lose their heads when they make wills. So you were a sort of dark horse at that time. H'm. Did this precious Penberthy ask you to marry him?"

"I thought he did. But he says he didn't. We talked about founding his clinic; I was to help him."

"And that was when you chucked painting for books about medicine and first-aid classes. Did your aunt know about the engagement?"

"He didn't want her told. It was to be our secret, till he got a better position. He was afraid she might think he was after the money."

"I daresay he was."

"He made out he was fond of me," she said, miserably.

"Of course, my dear child; your case is not unique. Didn't you tell any of your friends?"

"No." Wimsey reflected that the Ledbury episode had probably left a scar. Besides—did women tell things to other women? He had long doubted it.

"You were still engaged when Lady Dormer died, I take it?"

"As engaged as we ever were. Of course, he told me that there was something funny about the body. He said you and the Fentimans were trying to

defraud me of the money. I shouldn't have minded for myself—it was more money than I should have known what to do with. But it would have meant the clinic, you see.”

“Yes, you could start a pretty decent clinic with half a million. So that was why you shot me out of the house.”

He grinned—and then reflected a few moments.

“Look here,” he said, “I’m going to give you a bit of a shock, but it’ll have to come sooner or later. Has it ever occurred to you that it was Penberthy who murdered General Fentiman?”

“I—wondered,” she said, slowly. “I couldn’t think—who else—But you know they suspect *me*?”

“Oh, well—*cui bono* and all that—they couldn’t overlook you. They have to suspect every possible person, you know.”

“I don’t blame them at all. But I didn’t, you know.”

“Of course not. It was Penberthy. I look at it like this. Penberthy wanted money; he was sick of being poor, and he knew you would be certain to get *some* of Lady Dormer’s money. He’d probably heard about the family quarrel with the General, and expected it would be the lot. So he started to make your acquaintance. But he was careful. He asked you to keep it quiet—just in case, you see. The money might be so tied up that you couldn’t

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give it him, or you might lose it if you married, or it might only be quite a small annuity, in which case he'd want to look for somebody richer."

"We considered those points when we talked it over about the clinic."

"Yes. Well, then, Lady Dormer fell ill. The General went round and heard about the legacy that was coming to him. And then he toddled along to Penberthy, feeling very groggy, and promptly told him all about it. You can imagine him saying: 'You've got to patch me up long enough to get the money.' That must have been a nasty jar for Penberthy."

"It was. You see, he didn't even hear about my twelve thousand."

"Oh?"

"No. Apparently what the General said was, 'If only I last out poor Felicity, all the money comes to me. Otherwise it goes to the girl and my-boys only get seven thousand apiece.' That was why——"

"Just a moment. When did Penberthy tell you about that?"

"Why, later—when he said I was to compromise with the Fentimans."

"That explains it. I wondered why you gave in so suddenly. I thought, then, that you—Well, anyhow, Penberthy hears this, and gets the brilliant idea of putting General Fentiman out of the

way. So he gives him a slow-working kind of a pill——”

“Probably a powder in a very tough capsule that would take a long time to digest.”

“Good idea. Yes, very likely. And then the General, instead of heading straight for home, as he expected, goes off to the Club and dies there. And then Robert——”

He explained in detail what Robert had done, and resumed.

“Well, now—Penberthy was in a bad fix. If he drew attention at the time to the peculiar appearance of the corpse, he couldn’t reasonably give a certificate. In which case there would be a post-mortem and an analysis, and the digitalin would be found. If he kept quiet, the money might be lost and all his trouble would be wasted. Maddenin’ for him, wasn’t it? So he did what he could. He put the time of the death as early as he dared, and hoped for the best.”

“He told me he thought there would be some attempt to make it seem later than it really was. I thought it was *you* who were trying to hush everything up. And I was so furious that of course I told Mr. Pritchard to have a proper inquiry made and on no account to compromise.”

“Thank God you did,” said Wimsey.

“Why?”

“I’ll tell you presently. But Penberthy now—I

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can't think why *he* didn't persuade you to compromise. That would have made him absolutely safe."

"But he did! That's what started our first quarrel. As soon as he heard about it, he said I was a fool not to compromise. I couldn't understand his saying that, since he himself had said there was something wrong. We had a fearful row. That was the time I mentioned the twelve thousand that was coming to me anyway."

"What did he say?"

" 'I didn't know that.' Just like that. And then he apologized and said that the law was so uncertain, it would be best to agree to divide the money anyhow. So I rang up Mr. Pritchard and told him not to make any more fuss. And we were friends again."

"Was it the day after that, that Penberthy—er—said things to you?"

"Yes."

"Right. Then I can tell you one thing: he would never have been so brutal if he hadn't been in fear of his life. Do you know what had happened in between?"

She shook her head.

"I had been on the 'phone to him, and told him there was going to be an autopsy."

"Oh!"

"Yes—listen—you needn't worry any more

about it. He knew that the poison would be discovered, and that if he was known to be engaged to you, he was absolutely bound to be suspected. So he hurried to cut the connection with you—purely in self-defense.”

“But why do it in that brutal way?”

“Because, my dear, he knew that that particular accusation would be the very last thing a girl of your sort would tell people about. He made it absolutely impossible for you to claim him publicly. And he bolstered it up by engaging himself to the Rushworth female.”

“He didn’t care how *I* suffered.”

“He was in a beast of a hole,” said Wimsey, apologetically. “Mind you, it was a perfectly diabolical thing to do. I daresay he’s feeling pretty rotten about it.”

Ann Dorland clenched her hands.

“I’ve been so horribly ashamed——”

“Well, you aren’t any more, are you?”

“No—but——” A thought seemed to strike her.

“Lord Peter—I can’t *prove* a word of this. Everybody will think I was in league with him. And they’ll think that our quarrel and his getting engaged to Naomi was just a put-up job between us to get us both out of a difficulty.”

“You’ve got brains,” said Wimsey, admiringly. “*Now* you see why I thanked God you’d been so keen on an inquiry at first. Pritchard can make it

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pretty certain that you weren't an accessory before the fact, anyhow."

"Of course—so he can. Oh, I'm so glad! I *am* so glad." She burst into excited sobs and clutched Wimsey's hand. "I wrote him a letter—right at the beginning—saying I'd read about a case in which they'd proved the time of somebody's death by looking into his stomach, and asking if General Fentiman couldn't be dug up."

"Did you? Splendid girl! You *have* got a head on your shoulders! . . . No, I observe that it's on my shoulders. Go on. Have a real, good howl—I feel rather like howling myself. I've been quite worried about it all. But it's all right now, isn't it?"

"I am a fool . . . but I'm so thankful you came."

"So am I. Here, have a hanky. Poor old dear! . . . Hullo! there's Marjorie."

He released her and went out to meet Marjorie Phelps at the door.

"Lord Peter! Good lord!"

"Thank you, Marjorie," said Wimsey, gravely.

"No, but listen! Have you seen Ann?—I took her away. She's frightfully queer—and there's a policeman outside. But whatever she's done, I couldn't leave her alone in that awful house. You haven't come to—to——"

"Marjorie!" said Wimsey, "don't you ever talk to me again about feminine intuition. You've been

thinking all this time that that girl was suffering from guilty conscience. Well, she wasn't. It was a man, my child—a MAN!"

"How do you know?"

"My experienced eye told me as much at the first glance. It's all right now. Sorrow and sighing have fled away. I am going to take your young friend out to dinner."

"But why didn't she tell me what it was all about?"

"Because," said Wimsey, mincingly, "it wasn't the kind of thing one woman tells another."

CHAPTER XXI

Lord Peter Calls A Bluff

"IT IS NEW TO ME," SAID LORD PETER, GLANCING from the back window of the taxi at the other taxi which was following them, "to be shadowed by the police, but it amuses them and doesn't hurt us."

He was revolving ways and means of proof in his mind. Unhappily, all the evidence in favour of Ann Dorland was evidence against her as well—except, indeed, the letter to Pritchard. Damn Penberthy. The best that could be hoped for now was that the girl should escape from public inquiry with a verdict of 'Not proven.' Even if acquitted—even if never charged with the murder—she would always be suspect. The question was not one which could be conveniently settled by a brilliant flash of deductive logic, or the discovery of a blood-stained thumb-mark. It was a case for lawyers to argue—for a weighing of the emotional situation by twelve good and lawful persons. Presumably the association could be proved—the couple had met and dined together; probably the quarrel could be proved—but what next? Would a jury believe in

the cause of the quarrel? Would they think it a pre-arranged blind, or perhaps—or mistake it for the falling-out of rogues among themselves? What would they think of this plain, sulky, inarticulate girl, who had never had any real friends, and whose clumsy and tentative graspings after passion had been so obscure, so disastrous?

Penberthy, too—but Penberthy was easier to understand. Penberthy, cynical and bored with poverty, found himself in contact with this girl, who might be so well-off some day. And Penberthy, the physician, would not mistake the need for passion that made the girl such easy stuff to work on. So he carried on—bored with the girl, of course—keeping it all secret, till he saw which way the cat was going to jump. Then the old man—the truth about the will—the opportunity. And then, upsettingly, Robert . . . Would the jury see it like that?

Wimsey leaned out of the cab window and told the driver to go to the Savoy. When they arrived, he handed the girl over to the cloak-room attendant. "I am going up to change," he added, and turning, had the pleasure of seeing his sleuth arguing with the porter in the entrance-hall.

Bunter, previously summoned by telephone, was already in attendance with his master's dress clothes. Having changed, Wimsey passed through the hall again. The sleuth was there, quietly wait-

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ing. Wimsey grinned at him, and offered him a drink.

"I can't help it, my lord," said the detective.

"Of course not; you've sent for a bloke in a boiled shirt to take your place, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lord."

"More power to his elbow. So long."

He rejoined his charge and they went into the dining-room. Dressed in a green which did not suit her, she was undoubtedly plain. But she had character; he was not ashamed of her. He offered her the menu.

"What shall it be?" he asked. "Lobster and champagne?"

She laughed at him.

"Marjorie says you are an authority on food. I don't believe authorities on food ever take lobster and champagne. Anyway, I don't like lobster, much. Surely there's something they do best here, isn't there? Let's have that."

"You show the right spirit," said Wimsey. "I will compose a dinner for you."

He called the head waiter, and went into the question scientifically.

"*Huîtres Musgrave*—I am opposed on principle to the cooking of oysters—but it is a dish so excellent that one may depart from the rules in its favour. Fried in their shells, Miss Dorland, with little strips of bacon. Shall we try it?—The soup

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must be *Tortue. Vraie*, of course. The fish—oh! just a *Filet de Sole*, the merest mouthful, a hyphen between the prologue and the main theme.”

“That all sounds delightful. And what is the main theme to be?”

“I think a *Faisan Rôti* with *Pommes Byron*. And a salad to promote digestion. And, waiter—be sure the salad is dry and perfectly crisp. A *Soufflé Glace* to finish up with. And bring me the wine-list.”

They talked. When she was not on the defensive, the girl was pleasant enough in manner; a trifle downright and aggressive, perhaps, in her opinions, but needing only mellowing.

“What do you think of the *Romanée Conti*?” he asked, suddenly.

“I don’t know much about wine. It’s good. Not sweet, like Sauterne. It’s a little—well—harsh. But it’s harsh without being thin—quite different from that horrid Chianti people always seem to drink at Chelsea parties.”

“You’re right; it’s rather unfinished, but it has plenty of body—it’ll be a grand wine in ten years’ time. It’s 1915. Now, you see. Waiter, take this away and bring me a bottle of the 1908.”

He leaned towards his companion.

“Miss Dorland—may I be impertinent?”

“How? Why?”

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"Not an artist, not a bohemian, and not a professional man;—a man of the world."

"What *do* you mean by those cryptic words?"

"For you. That is the kind of man who is going to like you very much. Look! that wine I've sent away—it's no good for champagne-and-lobster sort of person, nor for very young people—it's too big and rough. But it's got the essential guts. So have you. It takes a fairly experienced palate to appreciate it. But you and it will come into your own one day. Get me?"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. But your man won't be at all the sort of person you're expecting. You have always thought of being dominated by somebody, haven't you?"

"Well——"

"But you'll find that yours will be the leading brain of the two. He will take great pride in the fact. And you will find the man reliable and kind, and it will turn out quite well."

"I didn't know you were a prophet."

"I am, though."

Wimsey took the bottle of 1908 from the waiter and glanced over the girl's head at the door. A man in a boiled shirt was making his way in, accompanied by the manager.

"I am a prophet," said Wimsey. "Listen. Something tiresome is going to happen—now, this

minute. But don't worry. Drink your wine, and trust."

The manager had brought the man to their table. It was Parker.

"Ah!" said Wimsey, brightly. "You'll forgive our starting without you, old man. Sit down. I think you know Miss Dorland."

Parker bowed and sat down.

"Have you come to arrest me?" asked Ann.

"Just to ask you to come down to the Yard with me," said Parker, smiling pleasantly and unfolding his napkin.

Ann looked palely at Wimsey, and took a gulp of the wine.

"Right," said Wimsey. "Miss Dorland has quite a lot to tell you. After dinner will suit us charmingly. What will you have?"

Parker, who was not imaginative, demanded a grilled steak.

"Shall we find any other friends at the Yard?" pursued Wimsey.

"Possibly," said Parker.

"Well, cheer up! You put me off my food, looking so grim. Hullo! Yes, waiter, what is it?"

"Excuse me, my lord; is this gentleman Detective-Inspector Parker?"

"Yes, yes," said Parker, "what's the matter?"

"You're wanted on the 'phone, sir."

Parker departed.

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"It's all right," said Wimsey to the girl. "I know you're straight, and I'll damn well see you through."

"What am I do to?"

"Tell the truth."

"It sounds so silly."

"They've heard lots of very much sillier stories than that."

"But—I don't want to—to be the one to——"

"You're still fond of him, then?"

"No!—but I'd rather it wasn't me."

"I'll be frank with you. I think it's going to be between you and him that suspicion will lie."

"In that case"—she set her teeth—"he can have what's coming to him."

"Thank the lord! I thought you were going to be noble and self-sacrificing and tiresome. You know. Like the people whose noble motives are misunderstood in chapter one and who get dozens of people tangled up in their miserable affairs till the family lawyer solves everything on the last page but two."

Parker had come back from the telephone.

"Just a moment!" He spoke in Peter's ear.

"Hullo?"

"Look here; this is awkward. George Fentiman——"

"Yes?"

"He's been found in Clerkenwell."

"Clerkenwell?"

"Yes; must have wandered back by 'bus or something. He's at the police-station; in fact he's given himself up."

"Good lord!"

"For the murder of his grandfather."

"The devil he has!"

"It's a nuisance; of course it must be looked into. I think perhaps I'd better put off interrogating Dorland and Penberthy. What are you doing with the girl, by the way?"

"I'll explain later. Look here—I'll take Miss Dorland back to Marjorie Phelps' place, and then come along and join you. The girl won't run away; I know that. And anyhow, you've got a man looking after her."

"Yes, I rather wish you would come with me; Fentiman is pretty queer, by all accounts. We've sent for his wife."

"Right. You buzz off, and I'll join you in—say in three quarters of an hour. What address? Oh, yes, righty-ho! Sorry you're missing your dinner."

"It's all in the day's work," growled Parker, and took his leave.

.

George Fentiman greeted them with a tired white smile.

"Hush!" he said. "I've told them all about it. *He's* asleep; don't wake him."

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"Who's asleep, dearest?" said Sheila.

"I mustn't say the name," said George, cunningly. "He'd hear it—even in his sleep—even if you whispered it. But he's tired, and he nodded off. So I ran in here and told them all about it while he snored."

The police superintendent tapped his forehead significantly behind Sheila's back.

"Has he made any statement?" asked Parker.

"Yes, he insisted on writing it himself. Here it is. Of course . . ." the Superintendent shrugged his shoulders.

"That's all right," said George. "I'm getting sleepy myself. I've been watching him for a day and a night, you know. I'm going to bed. Sheila—it's time to go to bed."

"Yes, dear."

"We'll have to keep him here to-night, I suppose," muttered Parker. "Has the doctor seen him?"

"We've sent for him, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Fentiman, I think if you'd take your husband into the room the officer will show you, that would be the best way. And we'll send the doctor in to you when he arrives. Perhaps it would be as well that he should see his own medical man too. Whom would you like us to send for?"

"Dr. Penberthy has vetted him from time to

time, I think," put in Wimsey, suddenly. "Why not send for him?"

Parker gasped involuntarily.

"He might be able to throw some light on the symptoms," said Wimsey, in a rigid voice.

Parker nodded.

"A good idea," he agreed. He moved to the telephone. George smiled as his wife put her arm about his shoulder.

"Tired," he said, "very tired. Off to bed, old girl."

A police-constable opened the door to them, and they started through it together; George leaned heavily on Sheila; his feet dragged.

"Let's have a look at his statement," said Parker.

It was written in a staggering handwriting, much blotted and erased, with words left out and repeated here and there.

"I am making this statement quickly while he is asleep, because if I wait he may wake up and stop me. You will say I was moved and seduced by instigation of but what they will not understand is that he is me and I am him. I killed my grandfather by giving him digitalin. I did not remember it till I saw the name on the bottle, but they have been looking for me ever since, so I know that he must have done it. That is why they began following me about, but he is very clever and misleads them. When he is awake. We were dancing all last night

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and that is why he is tired. He told me to smash the bottle so that you shouldn't find out, but they know I was the last person to see him. He is very cunning, but if you creep on him quickly now that he is asleep you will be able to bind him in chains and cast him into the pit and then I shall be able to sleep.

George Fentiman."

"Off his head, poor devil," said Parker. "We can't pay much attention to this. What did he say to you, superintendent?"

"He just came in, sir, and said 'I'm George Fentiman and I've come to tell you about how I killed my grandfather.' So I questioned him, and he rambled a good bit and then he asked for a pen and paper to make his statement. I thought he ought to be detained, and I rang up the Yard, sir."

"Quite right," said Parker.

The door opened and Sheila came out.

"He's fallen asleep," she said. "It's the old trouble come back again. He thinks he's the devil, you know. He's been like that twice before," she added, simply. "I'll go back to him till the doctors come."

The police-surgeon arrived first and went in; then, after a wait of a quarter of an hour, Penberthy came. He looked worried, and greeted Wimsey abruptly. Then he, too, went into the inner room. The others stood vaguely about, and

were presently joined by Robert Fentiman, whom an urgent summons had traced to a friend's house.

Presently the two doctors came out again.

"Nervous shock with well-marked delusions," said the police-surgeon, briefly. "Probably be all right to-morrow. Sleeping it off now. Been this way before, I understand. Just so. A hundred years ago they'd have called it diabolic possession, but *we* know better."

"Yes," said Parker, "but do you think he is under a delusion in saying he murdered his grandfather? Or did he actually murder him under the influence of this diabolical delusion? That's the point."

"Can't say just at present. Might be the one—might be the other. Much better wait till the attack passes off. You'll be able to find out better then."

"You don't think he's permanently—insane, then?" demanded Robert, with brusque anxiety.

"No—I don't. I think it's what you'd call a nerve-storm. That is your opinion, too, I believe?" he added, turning to Penberthy.

"Yes; that is my opinion."

"And what do you think about this delusion, Dr. Penberthy?" went on Parker. "Did he do this insane act?"

"He certainly thinks he did it," said Penberthy; "I couldn't possibly say for certain whether he has any foundation for the belief. From time to time he undoubtedly gets these fits of thinking that the

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devil has taken hold of him, and of course it's hard to say what a man might or might not do under the influence of such a delusion."

He avoided Robert's distressed eyes, and addressed himself exclusively to Parker.

"It seems to me," said Wimsey, "if you'll excuse me pushin' my opinion forward and all that—it seems to me that's a question of fact that can be settled without reference to Fentiman and his delusions. There's only the one occasion on which the pill could have been administered—would it have produced the effect that was produced at that particular time, or wouldn't it? If it couldn't take effect at 8 o'clock, then it couldn't, and there's an end of it."

He kept his eyes fixed on Penberthy, and saw him pass his tongue over his dry lips before speaking.

"I can't answer that off-hand," he said.

"The pill might have been introduced into General Fentiman's stock of pills at some other time," suggested Parker.

"So it might," agreed Penberthy.

"Had it the same shape and appearance as his ordinary pills?" demanded Wimsey, again fixing his eyes on Penberthy.

"Not having seen the pill in question, I can't say," said the latter.

"In any case," said Wimsey, "the pill in ques-

tion, which was one of Mrs. Fentiman's, I understand, had strychnine in it as well as digitalin. The analysis of the stomach would no doubt have revealed strychnine if present. That can be looked into."

"Of course," said the police-surgeon. "Well, gentlemen, I don't think we can do much more to-night. I have written out a prescription for the patient, with Dr. Penberthy's entire agreement"—he bowed; Penberthy bowed—"I will have it made up, and you will no doubt see that it is given to him. I shall be here in the morning."

He looked interrogatively at Parker, who nodded.

"Thank you, doctor; we will ask you for a further report to-morrow morning. You'll see that Mrs. Fentiman is properly looked after, Superintendent. If you wish to stay here and look after your brother and Mrs. Fentiman, Major, of course you may, and the Superintendent will make you as comfortable as he can."

Wimsey took Penberthy by the arm.

"Come round to the Club with me for a moment, Penberthy," he said. "I want to have a word with you."

CHAPTER XXII

The Cards On The Table

THERE WAS NOBODY IN THE LIBRARY AT THE Bellona Club; there never is. Wimsey led Penberthy into the farthest bay and sent a waiter for two double whiskies.

"Here's luck!" he said.

"Good luck," replied Penberthy. "What is it?"

"Look here," said Wimsey. "You've been a soldier. I think you're a decent fellow. You've seen George Fentiman. It's a pity, isn't it?"

"What about it?"

"If George Fentiman hadn't turned up with that delusion of his," said Wimsey, "you would have been arrested for the murder this evening. Now the point is this. When you are arrested, nothing, as things are, can prevent Miss Dorland's being arrested on the same charge. She's quite a decent girl, and you haven't treated her any too well, have you? Don't you think you might make things right for her by telling the truth straight away?"

Penberthy sat with a white face and said nothing.

"You see," went on Wimsey, "if once they get

her into the dock, she'll always be a suspected person. Even if the jury believe her story—and they may not, because juries are often rather stupid—people will always think there was 'something in it.' They'll say she was a very lucky woman to get off. That's damning for a girl, isn't it? They might even bring her in guilty. You and I know she isn't—but—you don't want the girl hanged, Penberthy, do you?"

Penberthy drummed on the table.

"What do you want me to do?" he said at last.

"Write a clear account of what actually happened," said Wimsey. "Make a clean job of it for these other people. Make it clear that Miss Dorland had nothing to do with it."

"And then?"

"Then do as you like. In your place I know what I should do."

Penberthy propped his chin on his hands and sat for some minutes staring at the works of Dickens in the leather-and-gold binding.

"Very well," he said at last. "You're quite right. I ought to have done it before. But—damn it!—if ever a man had rotten luck . . .

"If only Robert Fentiman hadn't been a rogue. It's funny, isn't it? That's your wonderful poetic justice, isn't it? If Robert Fentiman had been an honest man, I should have got my half-million, and Ann Dorland would have got a perfectly good

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husband, and the world would have gained a fine clinic, incidentally. But as Robert was a rogue—here we are . . .

"I didn't intend to be such a sweep to the Dorland girl. I'd have been decent to her if I'd married her. Mind you, she did sicken me a bit. Always wanting to be sentimental. It's true, what I said—she's a bit cracked about sex. Lots of 'em are. Naomi Rushworth, for instance. That's why I asked her to marry me. I had to be engaged to somebody, and I knew she'd take any one who asked her . . .

"It was so hideously easy, you see . . . that was the devil of it. The old man came along and put himself into my hands. Told me with one breath that I hadn't a dog's chance of the money, and in the next, asked me for a dose. I just had to put the stuff into a couple of capsules and tell him to take them at 7 o'clock. He put them in his spectacle-case, to make sure he wouldn't forget them. Not even a bit of paper to give me away. And the next day I'd only to get a fresh supply of the stuff and fill up the bottle. I'll give you the address of the chemist who sold it. Easy?—it was laughable . . . people put such power in our hands. . . .

"I never meant to get led into all this rotten way of doing things—it was just self-defense. I still don't care a damn about having killed the old man. I could have made better use of the money than

Robert Fentiman. He hasn't got two ideas in his head, and he's perfectly happy where he is. Though I suppose he'll be leaving the Army now . . . As for Ann, she ought to be grateful to me in a way. I've secured her the money, anyhow."

"Not unless you make it clear that she had no part in the crime," Wimsey reminded him.

"That's true. All right. I'll put it all on paper for you. Give me half an hour, will you?"

"Right you are," said Wimsey.

He left the library and wandered into the smoking-room. Colonel Marchbanks was there, and greeted him with a friendly smile.

"Glad you're here, Colonel. Mind if I come and chat to you for a moment?"

"By all means, my dear boy. I'm in no hurry to get home. My wife's away. What can I do for you?"

Wimsey told him, in a lowered voice. The Colonel was distressed.

"Ah, well," he said, "you've done the best thing, to my mind. I look at these matters from a soldier's point of view, of course. Much better to make a clean job of it all. Dear, dear! Sometimes, Lord Peter, I think that the War has had a bad effect on some of our young men. But then, of course, all are not soldiers by training, and that makes a great difference. I certainly notice a less fine sense of honour in these days than we had when I was a

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boy. There were not so many excuses made then for people; there were things that were done and things that were not done. Nowadays men—and, I am sorry to say, women too—let themselves go in a way that is to me quite incomprehensible. I can understand a man's committing murder in hot blood—but poisoning—and then putting a good, ladylike girl into such an equivocal position—no! I fail to understand it. Still, as you say, the right course is being taken at last."

"Yes," said Wimsey.

"Excuse me for a moment," said the Colonel, and went out.

When he returned, he went with Wimsey into the library. Penberthy had finished writing and was reading his statement through.

"Will that do?" he asked.

Wimsey read it, Colonel Marchbanks looking over the pages with him.

"That is quite all right," he said. "Colonel Marchbanks will witness it with me."

This was done. Wimsey gathered the sheets together and put them in his breast-pocket. Then he turned silently to the Colonel, as though passing the word to him.

"Dr. Penberthy," said the old man, "now that that paper is in Lord Peter Wimsey's hands, you understand that he can only take the course of communicating with the police. But as that would

cause a great deal of unpleasantness to yourself and to other people, you may wish to take another way out of the situation. As a doctor, you will perhaps prefer to make your own arrangements. If not——”

He drew out from his jacket-pocket the thing which he had fetched.

“If not, I happen to have brought this with me from my private locker. I am placing it here, in the table-drawer, preparatory to taking it down into the country to-morrow. It is loaded.”

“Thank you,” said Penberthy.

The Colonel closed the drawer slowly, stepped back a couple of paces and bowed gravely. Wimsey put his hand on Penberthy’s shoulder for a moment, then took the Colonel’s arm. Their shadows moved, lengthened, shortened, doubled and crossed as they passed the seven lights in the seven bays of the library. The door shut after them.

“How about a drink, Colonel?” said Wimsey.

They went into the bar, which was just preparing to close for the night. Several other men were there, talking over their plans for Christmas.

“I’m getting away south,” said Tin-Tummy Challoner. “I’m fed up with this climate and this country.”

“I wish you’d look us up, Wimsey,” said another man. “We could give you some very decent shooting. We’re having a sort of house-party; my wife,

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you know—must have all these young people round—awful crowd of women. But I'm getting one or two men who can play bridge and handle a gun, and it would be a positive charity to see me through. Deadly season, Christmas. Can't think why they invented it."

"It's all right if you've got kids," interrupted a large, red-faced man with a bald head. "The little beggars enjoy it. You ought to start a family, Anstruther."

"All very well," said Anstruther, "you're cut out by nature to dress up as Father Christmas. I tell you, what with one thing and another, entertaining and going about, and the servants we have to keep in a place like ours, it's a job to keep things going. If you know of a good thing, I wish you'd put me on to it. It's not as though——"

"Hullo!" said Challoner, "what was that?"

"Motor-bike, probably," said Anstruther. "As I was saying, it's not as though——"

"Something's happened," broke in the red-faced man, setting down his glass.

There were voices, and the running to and fro of feet. The door was flung open. Startled faces turned towards it. Wetheridge burst in, pale and angry.

"I say, you fellows," he cried, "here's another unpleasantness. Penberthy's shot himself in the library. People ought to have more consideration for the members. Where's Culyer?"

The Cards On The Table

Wimsey pushed his way out into the entrance-hall. There, as he had expected, he found the plain-clothes detective who had been told off to shadow Penberthy.

"Send for Inspector Parker," he said. "I have a paper to give him. Your job's over; it's the end of the case."

Post-Mortem

"AND GEORGE IS ALL RIGHT AGAIN NOW?"

"Thank heaven, yes—getting on splendidly. The doctor says he worked himself into it, just out of worry lest he should be suspected. It never occurred to me—but then George is very quick at putting two and two together."

"Of course he knew he was one of the last people to see his grandfather."

"Yes, and seeing the name on the bottle—and the police coming——"

"That did it. And you're sure he's all right?"

"Oh, rather. The minute he knew that it was all cleared up, he seemed to come out from under a blanket. He sent you all sorts of messages, by the way."

"Well, as soon as he's fit you must come and dine with me . . ."

.

". . . A simple case, of course, as soon as you had disentangled the Robert part of it."

"A damned unsatisfactory case, Charles. Not the kind I like. No real proof."

"Nothing in it for us, of course. Just as well it

never came to trial, though. With juries you never know."

"No; they might have let Penberthy off; or convicted them both."

"Exactly. If you ask me, I think Ann Dorland is a very lucky young woman."

"Oh, God!—you *would* say that . . ."

". . . Yes, of course, I'm sorry for Naomi Rushworth. But she needn't be so spiteful. She goes about hinting that of course dear Walter was got over by that Dorland girl and sacrificed himself to save her."

"Well, that's natural, I suppose. You thought Miss Dorland had done it yourself at one time, you know, Marjorie."

"I didn't know then about her being engaged to Penberthy. And I think he deserved all he got . . . Well, I know he's dead, but it was a rotten way to treat a girl, and Ann's far too good for that kind of thing. People have a perfect right to want love-affairs. You men always think . . ."

"Not me, Marjorie. I don't think."

"Oh, you! You're almost human. I'd almost take you on myself if you asked me. You don't feel inclined that way, I suppose?"

"My dear—if a great liking and friendship were enough, I would—like a shot. But that wouldn't satisfy you, would it?"

The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club

"It wouldn't satisfy *you*, Peter. I'm sorry. Forget it."

"I won't forget it. It's the biggest compliment I've ever had paid me. Great Scott! I only wish . . ."

"There! that's all right, you needn't make a speech. And you won't go away tactfully forever, will you?"

"Not if you don't want me to."

"And you won't be embarrassed?"

"No, I won't be embarrassed. Portrait of a young man poking the fire to bits to indicate complete freedom from embarrassment. Let's go and feed somewhere, shall we? . . ."

.

". . . Well, and how did you get on with the heiress and the lawyers and all that lot?"

"Oh! there was a long argument. Miss Dorland insisted on dividing the money, and I said no, I couldn't think of it. She said it was only hers as the result of a crime, and Pritchard and Murbles said she wasn't responsible for other people's crimes. And I said it would look like my profiting by my own attempt at fraud, and she said, not at all, and we went on and on, don't you know. That's a damned decent girl, Wimsey."

"Yes, I know. The moment I found she preferred burgundy to champagne I had the highest opinion of her."

"No, really—there's something very fine and straightforward about her."

"Oh, yes—not a bad girl at all; though I shouldn't have said she was quite your sort."

"Why not?"

"Well—arty and all that. And her looks aren't her strong point."

"You needn't be offensive, Wimsey. Surely I may be allowed to appreciate a woman of intelligence and character. I may not be highbrow, but I have *some* ideas beyond the front row of the chorus. And what that girl went through with that blighter Penberthy makes my blood boil."

"Oh, you've heard all about that?"

"I have. She told me, and I respected her for it. I thought it most courageous of her. It's about time somebody brought a little brightness into that poor girl's life. You don't realize how desperately lonely she has been. She had to take up that art business to give her an interest, poor child, but she's really cut out for an ordinary, sensible, feminine life. You may not understand that, with your ideas, but she has really a very sweet nature."

"Sorry, Fentiman."

"She made me ashamed, the way she took the whole thing. When I think of the trouble I got her into, owing to my damned dishonest tinkering about with—you know——"

"My dear man, you were perfectly providential.

The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club

If you hadn't tinkered about, as you say, she'd be married to Penberthy by now."

"That's true—and that makes it so amazing of her to forgive me. She *loved* that blighter, Wimsey. You don't know. It's absolutely pathetic."

"Well, you'll have to do your best to make her forget it."

"I look on that as a duty, Wimsey."

"Just so. Doing anything to-night? Care to come and look at a show?"

"Sorry—I'm booked. Taking Miss Dorland to the new thing at the Palladium, in fact. Thought it'd do her good—buck her up and so on."

"Oh?—good work!—Here's luck to it . . ."

.

". . . and the cooking is getting perfectly disgraceful. I spoke to Culyer about it only yesterday. But he won't do anything. I don't know what's the good of the committee. This club isn't half what it used to be. In fact, Wimsey, I'm thinking of resigning."

"Oh, don't do that, Wetheridge. It wouldn't be the same place without you."

"Look at all the disturbance there has been lately. Police and reporters—and then Penberthy blowing his brains out in the library. And the coal's all slate. Only yesterday something exploded like a shell—I assure you, exactly like a shell—in the card-room; and as nearly as possible got me in the eye. I said

to Culyer, 'This must *not* occur again.' You may laugh, but I knew a man who was blinded by a thing popping out suddenly like that. These things never happened before the War, and—great heavens! William! Look at this wine! Smell it! *Taste* it! Corked? Yes, I should think it *was* corked! My God! I don't know what's come to this Club."



SUSPICIOUS
CHARACTERS

Published in Great Britain under the title
THE FIVE RED HERRINGS

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DOROTHY L. SAYERS

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FOREWORD

*To my friend Joe Dignam,
kindest of landlords*

DEAR JOE,—

Here at last is your book about Gatehouse and Kirkcudbright. All the places are real places and all the trains are real trains, and all the landscapes are correct, except that I have run up a few new houses here and there. But you know better than anybody that none of the people are in the least like the real people, and that no Galloway artist would ever think of getting intoxicated or running away from his wife or bashing a fellow-citizen over the head. All that is just put in for fun and to make it more exciting.

If I have accidentally given any real person's name to a nasty character, please convey my apologies to that person, and assure him or her that it was entirely unintentional. Even bad characters have to be called something. And please tell Provost Laurie that though this story is laid in the petrol-gas period, I have not forgotten that Gatehouse will now have its electric light by which to read this book.

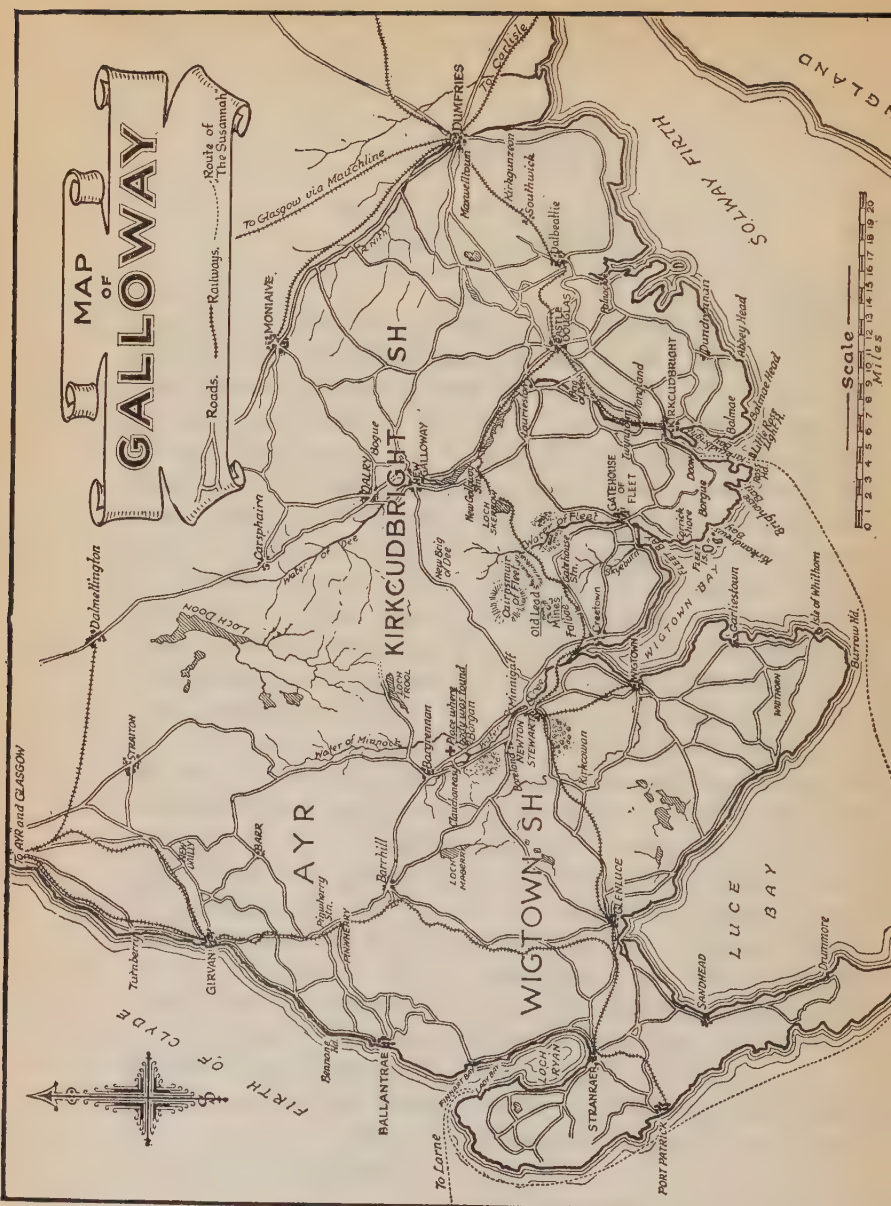
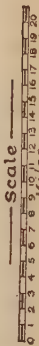
And if you should meet Mr. Millar of the Ellangowan Hotel, or the station-master at Gatehouse, or the booking-clerks at Kirkcudbright, or any of the hundred-and-one kindly people who so patiently answered my questions about railway-tickets and omnibuses and the old mines over at Creetown, give them my very best thanks for their assistance and my apologies for having bothered them so.

Give my love to everybody, not forgetting Felix, and tell Mrs. Dignam that we shall come back next summer to eat some more potato-scones at the Anwoth.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS.

MAP OF GALLOWAY

Route of The Steamship
Roads. Railways.



CHAPTER I

CAMPBELL QUICK

IF ONE LIVES IN GALLOWAY, ONE EITHER FISHES OR PAINTS. "Either" is perhaps misleading, for most of the painters are fishers also in their spare time. To be neither of these things is considered odd and almost eccentric. Fish is the standard topic of conversation in the pub and the post-office, in the garage and the street, with every sort of person, from the man who arrives for the season with three Hardy rods and a Rolls-Royce, to the man who leads a curious, contemplative life, watching the salmon-nets on the Dee. Weather, which in other parts of the Kingdom is gauged by the standards of the farmer, the gardener, and the week-ender, is considered in Galloway in terms of fish and paint. The fisherman-painter has the best of the bargain as far as the weather goes, for the weather that is too bright for the trout deluges his hills and his sea with floods of radiant colour; the rain that interrupts picture-making puts water into the rivers and the lochs and sends him hopefully forth with rod and creel; while on cold dull days, when there is neither purple on the hills nor fly on the river, he can join a friendly party in a cosy bar and exchange information about Cardinals and March Browns, and practise making intricate knots in gut.

The artistic centre of Galloway is Kirkcudbright, where the painters form a scattered constellation, whose nucleus is in the High Street, and whose outer stars twinkle in remote hillside cottages, radiating brightness as far as Gatehouse-of-Fleet. There are large and stately studios, panelled and high, in strong stone houses filled with gleaming brass and pol-

Suspicious Characters

ished oak. There are workaday studios—summer perching-places rather than settled homes—where a good north light and a litter of brushes and canvas form the whole of the artistic stock-in-trade. There are little homely studios, gay with blue and red and yellow curtains and odd scraps of pottery, tucked away down narrow closes and adorned with gardens, where old-fashioned flowers riot in the rich and friendly soil. There are studios that are simply and solely barns, made beautiful by ample proportions and high-pitched rafters, and habitable by the addition of a tortoise stove and a gas-ring. There are artists who have large families and keep domestics in cap and apron; artists who engage rooms, and are taken care of by landladies; artists who live in couples or alone, with a woman who comes in to clean; artists who live hermit-like and do their own charring. There are painters in oils, painters in water-colour, painters in pastel, etchers and illustrators, workers in metal; artists of every variety, having this one thing in common—that they take their work seriously and have no time for amateurs.

Into this fishing and painting community, Lord Peter Wimsey was received on friendly and even affectionate terms. He could make a respectable cast, and he did not pretend to paint, and therefore, though English and an "incomer," gave no cause of offence. The Southron is tolerated in Scotland on the understanding that he does not throw his weight about, and from this peculiarly English vice Lord Peter was laudably free. True, his accent was affected and his behaviour undignified to a degree, but he had been weighed in the balance over many seasons and pronounced harmless, and when he indulged in any startling eccentricity, the matter was dismissed with a shrug and a tolerant, "Christ, it's only his lordship."

Wimsey was in the bar of the McClellan Arms on the

evening that the unfortunate dispute broke out between Campbell and Waters. Campbell, the landscape painter, had had maybe one or two more wee ones than was absolutely necessary, especially for a man with red hair, and their effect had been to make him even more militantly Scottish than usual. He embarked on a long eulogy of what the Jocks had done in the Great War, only interrupting his tale to inform Waters in parenthesis that all the English were of mongrel ancestry and unable even to pronounce their own bluidy language.

Waters was an Englishman of good yeoman stock, and, like all Englishmen, was ready enough to admire and praise all foreigners except dagoes and niggers, but, like all Englishmen, he did not like to hear them praise themselves. To boast loudly in public of one's own country seemed to him indecent—like enlarging on the physical perfections of one's own wife in a smoking-room. He listened with that tolerant, petrified smile which the foreigner takes, and indeed quite correctly takes, to indicate a self-satisfaction so impervious that it will not even trouble to justify itself.

Campbell pointed out that all the big administrative posts in London were held by Scotsmen, that England had never succeeded in conquering Scotland, that if Scotland wanted Home Rule, by God, she would take it, that when certain specified English regiments had gone to pieces they had had to send for Scottish officers to control them, and that when any section of the front line had found itself in a tight place, its mind was at once relieved by knowing that the Jocks were on its left. "You ask anybody who was in the War, my lad," he added, acquiring in this way an unfair advantage over Waters, who had only just reached fighting age when the War ended, "they'll tell you what they thought of the Jocks."

Suspicious Characters

"Yes," said Waters, with a disagreeable sneer, "I know what they said. 'They skite too much.'"

Being naturally polite and in a minority, he did not add the remainder of that offensive quotation, but Campbell was able to supply it for himself. He burst into an angry retort, which was not merely nationally, but also personally abusive.

"The trouble with you Scotch," said Waters, when Campbell paused to take breath, "is that you have an inferiority complex."

He emptied his glass in a don't-careish manner and smiled at Wimsey.

It was probably the smile even more than the sneer which put the final touch to Campbell's irritation. He used a few brief and regrettable expressions, and transferred the better part of the contents of his glass to Waters' countenance.

"Och, noo, Mr. Campbell," protested Wullie Murdoch. He did not like these disturbances in his bar.

But Waters by this time was using even more regrettable language than Campbell as they wrestled together among the broken glass and sawdust.

"I'll break your qualified neck for this," he said savagely, "you dirty Highland tyke."

"Here, chuck it, Waters," said Wimsey, collaring him, "don't be a fool. The fellow's drunk."

"Come away, man," said McAdam, the fisherman, enveloping Campbell in a pair of brawny arms. "This is no way to behave. Be quiet."

The combatants fell apart, panting.

"This won't do," said Wimsey, "this isn't the League of Nations. A plague on both your houses! Have a bit of sense."

"He called me a ——," muttered Waters, wiping the whiskey from his face. "I'm damned if I'll stand it. He'd

better keep out of my way, that's all." He glared furiously at Campbell.

"You'll find me if you want me," retorted Campbell. "I shan't run away."

"Now, now, gentlemen," said Murdoch.

"He comes here," said Campbell, "with his damned sneering ways——"

"Nay, Mr. Campbell," said the landlord, "but ye shuldna ha' said thae things to him."

"I'll say what I damn well like to him," insisted Campbell.

"Not in my bar," replied Murdoch, firmly.

"I'll say them in any damned bar I choose," said Campbell, "and I'll say it again—he's a ——."

"Hut!" said McAdam, "ye'll be thinkin' better of it in the morning. Come away now—I'll give ye a lift back to Gatehouse."

"You be damned," said Campbell, "I've got my own car and I can drive it. And I don't want to see any of the whole blasted lot of ye again."

He plunged out, and there was a pause.

"Dear, dear," said Wimsey.

"I think I'd best be off out of it too," said Waters, sullenly.

Wimsey and McAdam exchanged glances.

"Bide a bit," said the latter. "There's no need to be in sic a hurry. Campbell's a hasty man, and when there's a wee bit drink in him he says mair nor he means."

"Ay," said Murdoch, "but he had no call to be layin' them names to Mr. Waters, none at all. It's a verra great pity—a verra great pity indeed."

"I'm sorry if I was rude to the Scotch," said Waters, "I didn't mean to be, but I can't stand that fellow at any price."

Suspicious Characters

"Och, that's a' richt," said McAdam. "Ye meant no harm, Mr. Waters. What'll ye have?"

"Oh, a double Scotch," replied Waters, with rather a shame-faced grin.

"That's right," said Wimsey, "drown remembrance of the insult in the wine of the country."

A man named McGeoch, who had held aloof from the disturbance, rose up and came to the bar.

"Another Worthington," he said briefly. "Campbell will be getting into trouble one of these days, I shouldn't wonder. The manners of him are past all bearing. You heard what he said to Strachan up at the golf-course the other day. Making himself out the boss of the whole place. Strachan told him if he saw him on the course again, he'd wring his neck."

The others nodded silently. The row between Campbell and the golf-club secretary at Gatehouse had indeed become local history.

"And I would not blame Strachan, neither," went on McGeoch. "Here's Campbell only lived two seasons in Gatehouse, and he's setting the whole place by the ears. He's a devil when he's drunk and a lout when he's sober. It's a great shame. Our little artistic community has always got on well together, without giving offence to anybody. And now there are nothing but rows and bickerings—all through this fellow Campbell."

"Och," said Murdoch, "he'll settle down in time. The man's no a native o' these parts and he doesna verra weel understand his place. Forbye, for all his havers, he's no a Scotsman at a', for everybody knows he's fra' Glasgow, and his mother was an Ulsterwoman, by the name of Flanagan."

"That's the sort that talks loodest," put in Murray, the banker, who was a native of Kirkwall, and had a deep and

not always silent contempt for anybody born south of Wick. "But it's best to pay no attention to him. If he gets what is coming to him, I'm thinking it'll no be from anybody here."

He nodded meaningly.

"Ye'll be thinking of Hugh Farren?" suggested McAdam.

"I'll be naming no names," said Murray, "but it's well known that he has made trouble for himself with a certain lady."

"It's no fault of the lady's," said McGeoch, emphatically.

"I'm not saying it is. But there's some gets into trouble without others to help them to it."

"I shouldn't have fancied Campbell in the rôle of a home-breaker," said Wimsey, pleasantly.

"I shouldn't fancy him at all," growled Waters, "but he fancies himself quite enough, and one of these days——"

"There, there," said Murdoch, hastily. "It's true he's no a verra popular man, is Campbell, but it's best to be patient and tak' no notice of him."

"That's all very well," said Waters.

"And wasn't there some sort of row about fishing?" interrupted Wimsey. If the talk had to be about Campbell, it was better to steer it away from Waters at all costs.

"Och, ay," said McAdam. "Him and Mr. Jock Graham is juist at daggers drawn aboot it. Mr. Graham will be fishing the pool below Campbell's hoose. Not but there's plenty pools in the Fleet wi'out disturbin' Campbell, if the man wad juist be peaceable aboot it. But it's no his pool when a's said and dune—the river's free—and it's no to be expectit that Mr. Graham will pay ony heed to his claims, him that pays nae heed to onybody."

"Particularly," said McGeoch, "after Campbell had tried to duck him in the Fleet."

Suspicious Characters

"Did he though, by Jove?" said Wimsey, interested.

"Ay, but he got weel duckit himsel'," said Murdoch, savouring the reminiscence. "And Graham's been fushin' there every nicht since then, wi' yin or twa of the lads. He'll be there the nicht, I wadna wonder."

"Then if Campbell's spoiling for a row, he'll know where to go for it," said Wimsey. "Come on, Waters, we'd better make tracks."

Waters, still sulky, rose and followed him. Wimsey steered him home to his lodgings, prattling cheerfully, and tucked him into bed.

"And I shouldn't let Campbell get on your nerves," he said, interrupting a long grumble, "he's not worth it. Go to sleep and forget it, or you'll do no work to-morrow. That's pretty decent, by the way," he added, pausing before a landscape which was propped on the chest of drawers. "You're a good hand with the knife, aren't you, old man?"

"Who, me?" said Waters. "You don't know what you're talking about. Campbell's the only man who can handle a knife in this place—according to him. He's even had the blasted cheek to say Gowan is an out-of-date old blunderer."

"That's high treason, isn't it?"

"I should think so. Gowan's a real painter—my God, it makes me hot when I think of it. He actually said it at the Arts Club in Edinburgh, before a whole lot of people, friends of Gowan's."

"And what did Gowan say?"

"Oh, various things. They're not on speaking terms now. Damn the fellow. He's not fit to live. You heard what he said to me?"

"Yes, but I don't want to hear it again. Let the fellow dree his own weird. He's not worth bothering with."

"No, that's a fact. And his work's not so wonderful as to excuse his beastly personality."

"Can't he paint?"

"Oh, he can paint—after a fashion. He's what Gowan calls him—a commercial traveller. His stuff's damned impressive at first sight, but it's all tricks. Anybody could do it, given the formula. I could do a perfectly good Campbell in half an hour. Wait a moment, I'll show you."

He thrust out a leg from the bed. Wimsey pushed him firmly back again.

"Show me some other time. When I've seen his stuff. I can't tell if the imitation's good till I've seen the original, can I?"

"No. Well, you go and look at his things and then I'll show you. Oh, Lord, my head's fuzzy like nothing on earth."

"Go to sleep," said Wimsey. "Shall I tell Mrs. McLeod to let you sleep in, as they say? And call you with a couple of aspirins on toast?"

"No; I've got to be up early, worse luck. But I shall be all right in the morning."

"Well, cheerio, then, and sweet dreams," said Wimsey.

He shut the door after him carefully and wandered thoughtfully back to his own habitation.

.

Campbell, chugging fitfully homewards across the hill which separates Kirkcudbright from Gatehouse-of-Fleet, recapitulated his grievances to himself in a sour monotone, as he mishandled his gears. That damned, sneering, smirking swine Waters! He'd managed to jolt him out of his pose of superiority, anyhow. Only he wished it hadn't happened before McGeoch. McGeoch would tell Strachan, and Strachan would redouble his own good opinion of himself.

Suspicious Characters

"You see," he would say, "I turned the man off the golf-course and look how right I was to do it. He's just a fellow that gets drunk and quarrels in public-houses." Curse Strachan, with his perpetual sergeant-major's air of having you on the mat. Strachan, with his domesticity and his precision and his local influence, was at the base of all the trouble, if one came to think of it. He pretended to say nothing, and all the time he was spreading rumours and scandal and setting the whole place against one. Strachan was a friend of that fellow Farren too. Farren would hear about it, and would jump at the excuse to make himself still more obnoxious. There would have been no silly row that night at all if it hadn't been for Farren. That disgusting scene before dinner! That was what had driven him, Campbell, to the McClellan Arms. His hand hesitated on the wheel. Why not go back straight away and have the thing out with Farren?

After all, what did it matter? He stopped the car and lit a cigarette, smoking fast and savagely. If the whole place *was* against him, he hated the place anyhow. There was only one decent person in it, and she was tied up to that brute Farren. The worst of it was, she was devoted to Farren. She didn't care twopence for anybody else, if Farren would only see it. And he, Campbell, knew it as well as anybody. He wanted nothing wrong. He only wanted, when he was tired and fretted, and sick of his own lonely, uncomfortable shack of a place, to go and sit among the cool greens and blues of Gilda Farren's sitting-room and be soothed by her slim beauty and comforting voice. And Farren, with no more sense or imagination than a bull, must come blundering in, breaking the spell, putting his own foul interpretation on the thing, trampling the lilies in Campbell's garden of refuge. No wonder Farren's landscapes looked as if they were painted with an axe. The man had no delicacy. His

reds and blues hurt your eyes, and he saw life in reds and blues. If Farren were to die, now, if one could take his bull-neck in one's hands and squeeze it till his great staring blue eyes popped out like—he laughed—like bull's-eyes—that was a damned funny joke. He'd like to tell Farren that and see how he took it.

Farren was a devil, a beast, a bully, with his artistic temperament, which was nothing but inartistic temper. There was no peace with Farren about. There was no peace anywhere. If he went back to Gatehouse, he knew what he would find there. He had only to look out of his bedroom window to see Jock Graham whipping the water just under the wall of the house—doing it on purpose to annoy him. Why couldn't Graham leave him alone? There was better fishing up by the dams. The whole thing was sheer persecution. It wasn't any good, either, to go to bed and take no notice. They would wake him up in the small hours, banging at his window and bawling out the number of their catch—they might even leave a contemptuous offering of trout on his window-sill, wretched little fish like minnows, which ought to have been thrown back again. He only hoped Graham would slip up on the stones one night and fill his waders and be drowned among his infernal fish. The thing that riled him most of all was that this nightly comedy was played out under the delighted eye of his neighbour, Ferguson. Since that fuss about the garden-wall, Ferguson had become absolutely intolerable.

It was perfectly true, of course, that he had backed his car into Ferguson's wall and knocked down a stone or two, but if Ferguson had left his wall in decent repair it wouldn't have done any damage. That great tree of Ferguson's had sent its roots right under the wall and broken up the foundations, and what was more, it threw up huge suckers in

Suspicious Characters

Campbell's garden. He was perpetually rooting the beastly things up. A man had no right to grow trees under a wall so that it tumbled down at the slightest little push, and then demand extravagant payments for repairs. He would not repair Ferguson's wall. He would see Ferguson damned first.

He gritted his teeth. He wanted to get out of this stifle of petty quarrels and have one good, big, blazing row with somebody. If only he could have smashed Waters' face to pulp—let himself go—had the thing out, he would have felt better. Even now he could go back—or forward—it didn't matter which, and have the whole blasted thing right out with somebody.

He had been brooding so deeply that he never noticed the hum of a car in the distance and the lights flickering out and disappearing as the road dipped and wound. The first thing he heard was a violent squealing of brakes and an angry voice demanding:

"What the bloody hell are you doing, you fool, sitting out like that in the damn middle of the road right on the bend?" And then, as he turned, blinking in the glare of the headlights, to grapple with this new attack, he heard the voice say, with a kind of exasperated triumph:

"Campbell. Of course. I might have known it couldn't be anybody else."

CHAPTER II

CAMPBELL DEAD

"DID YE HEAR ABOUT MR. CAMPBELL?" SAID MR. MURDOCH of the McClellan Arms, polishing a glass carefully as a preparation for filling it with beer.

"Why, what further trouble has he managed to get into since last night?" asked Wimsey. He leaned an elbow on the bar and prepared to relish anything that might be offered to him.

"He's deid," said Mr. Murdoch.

"Deid?" said Wimsey, startled into unconscious mimicry.

Mr. Murdoch nodded.

"Och, ay; McAdam's juist brocht the news in from Gatehouse. They found the body at 2 o'clock up in the hills by Newton-Stewart."

"Good heavens!" said Wimsey. "But what did he die of?"

"Juist tumbled intae the burn," replied Mr. Murdoch, "an' drooned himself, by what they say. The pollis'll be up there now tae bring him doon."

"An accident, I suppose."

"Ay, imph'm. The folk at the Borgan seed him pentin' there shortly after 10 this morning on the wee bit high ground by the brig, and Major Dougal gaed by at 2 o'clock wi' his rod an' spied the body liggin' in the burn. It's slippery there and fou o' broken rocks. I'm thinkin' he'll ha' climbed doon tae fetch some watter for his pentin', mebbe, and slippit on the stanes."

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"He wouldn't want water for oil-paints," said Wimsey, thoughtfully, "but he might have wanted to mix mustard for his sandwiches or fill a kettle or get a drop for his whiskey. I say, Murdoch, I think I'll just toddle over there in the car and have a look at him. Corpses are rather in my line, you know. Where is this place exactly?"

"Ye maun tak' the coast-road through Creetown to Newton-Stewart," said Mr. Murdoch, "and turn to the richt over the brig and then to the richt again at the sign-post along the road to Bargrennan and juist follow the road till ye turn over a wee brig on the richt-hand side over the Cree and then tak' the richt-hand road."

"In fact," said Wimsey, "you keep on turning to the right. I think I know the place. There's a bridge and another gate, and a burn with salmon in it."

"Ay, the Minnoch, whaur Mr. Dennison caught the big fish last year. Well, it'll be juist afore ye come to the gate, away to your left abune the brig."

Wimsey nodded.

"I'll be off then," he said, "I don't want to miss the fun. See you later, old boy. I say—I don't mind betting this is the most popular thing Campbell ever did. Nothing in life became him like the leaving it, eh, what?"

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It was a marvellous day in late August, and Wimsey's soul purred within him as he pushed the car along. The road from Kirkcudbright to Newton-Stewart is of a varied loveliness hard to surpass, and with a sky full of bright sun and rolling cloud-banks, hedges filled with flowers, a well-made road, a lively engine and the prospect of a good corpse at the end of it, Lord Peter's cup of happiness was full. He was a man who loved simple pleasures.

He passed through Gatehouse, waving a cheerful hand to the proprietor of the Anwoth Hotel, climbed up beneath the grim blackness of Cardoness Castle, drank in for the thousandth time the strange, Japanese beauty of Mossyard Farm, set like a red jewel under its tufted trees on the blue sea's rim, and the Italian loveliness of Kirkdale, with its fringe of thin and twisted trees and the blue Wigtownshire coast gleaming across the bay. Then the old Border keep of Barholm, surrounded by white-washed farm buildings; then a sudden gleam of bright grass, like a lawn in Avalon, under the shade of heavy trees. The wild garlic was over now, but the scent of it seemed still to hang about the place in memory, filling it with the shudder of vampire wings and memories of the darker side of Border history. Then the old granite crushing mill on its white jetty, surrounded by great clouds of stone-dust, with a derrick sprawled across the sky and a tug riding at anchor. Then the salmon-nets and the wide semi-circular sweep of the bay, rosy every summer with sea-pinks, purple-brown with the mud of the estuary, majestic with the huge hump of Cairnsmuir rising darkly over Creetown. Then the open road again, dipping and turning—the white lodge on the left, the cloud-shadows rolling, the cottages with their roses and asters clustered against white and yellow walls; then Newton-Stewart, all grey roofs huddling down to the stony bed of the Cree, its thin spires striking the sky-line. Over the bridge and away to the right by the kirkyard, and then the Bargrennan road, curling like the road to Roundabout, with the curves of the Cree glittering through the tree-stems and the tall blossoms and bracken golden by the wayside. Then the lodge and the long avenue of rhododendrons—then a wood of silver birch, mounting, mounting to shut out the sunlight. Then a cluster of stone cottages—then the bridge and the gate, and the stony hill-

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road, winding between mounds round as the hill of the King of Elf-land, green with grass and purple with heather and various with sweeping shadows.

Wimsey pulled up as he came to the second bridge and the rusty gate, and drew the car on to the grass. There were other cars there, and glancing along to the left he saw a little group of men gathered on the edge of the burn forty or fifty yards from the road. He approached by way of a little sheep-track, and found himself standing on the edge of a scarp of granite that shelved steeply down to the noisy waters of the Minnoch. Beside him, close to the edge of the rock, stood a sketching easel, with a stool and a palette. Down below, at the edge of a clear brown pool, fringed with knotted hawthorns, lay something humped and dismal, over which two or three people were bending.

A man, who might have been a crofter, greeted Wimsey with a kind of cautious excitement.

"He's doon there, sir. Ay, he'll juist ha' slippit over the edge. Yon's Sergeant Dalziel and Constable Ross, mekkin' their investigation the noo."

There seemed little doubt how the accident had happened. On the easel was a painting, half, or more than half finished, the paint still wet and shining. Wimsey could imagine the artist getting up, standing away to view what he had done—stepping farther back towards the treacherous granite slope. Then the scrape of a heel on the smooth stone, the desperate effort to recover, the slither of leather on the baked short grass, the stagger, the fall, and the bump, bump, bump of the tumbling body, sheer down the stone face of the ravine to where the pointed rocks grinned like teeth among the chuckling water.

"I know the man," said Wimsey. "It's a very nasty thing, isn't it? I think I'll go down and have a look."

"Ye'll mind your footing," said the crofter.

"I certainly will," said Wimsey, clambering crablike among the stones and bracken. "I don't want to make another police-exhibit."

The Sergeant looked up at the sound of Wimsey's scrambling approach. They had met already, and Dalziel was prepared for Wimsey's interest in corpses, however commonplace the circumstances.

"Hech, my lord," said he, cheerfully. "I dooted ye'd be here before verra long. Ye'll know Dr. Cameron, maybe?"

Wimsey shook hands with the doctor—a lanky man with a non-committal face—and asked how they were getting on with the business.

"Och, well, I've examined him," said the doctor. "He's dead beyond a doubt—been dead some hours, too. The rigor, ye see, is well developed."

"Was he drowned?"

"I cannot be certain about that. But my opinion—mind ye, it is only my opinion—is that he was not. The bones of the temple are fractured, and I would be inclined to say he got his death in falling or in striking the stones in the burn. But I cannot make a definite pronouncement, you understand, till I have had an autopsy and seen if there is any water in his lungs."

"Quite so," said Wimsey. "The bump on the head might only have made him unconscious, and the actual cause of death might be drowning."

"That is so. When we first saw him, he was lying with his mouth under water, but that might very well come from washing about in the scour of the burn. There are certain abrasions on the hands and head, some of which are—again in my opinion—post-mortem injuries. See here—and here."

The doctor turned the corpse over, to point out the marks

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in question. It moved all of a piece, crouched and bundled together, as though it had stiffened in the act of hiding its face from the brutal teeth of the rocks.

"But here's where he got the big dunt," added the doctor. He guided Wimsey's fingers to Campbell's left temple, and Wimsey felt the bone give under his light pressure.

"Nature has left the brain ill-provided in those parts," remarked Dr. Cameron. "The skull there is remarkably thin, and a comparatively trifling blow will crush it like an egg-shell."

Wimsey nodded. His fine, long fingers were gently exploring head and limbs. The doctor watched him with grave approval.

"Man," he said, "ye'd make a fine surgeon. Providence has given ye the hands for it."

"But not the head," said Wimsey, laughing. "Yes, he's got knocked about a bit. I don't wonder, coming down that bank full tilt."

"Ay, it's a dangerous place," said the Sergeant. "Weel, noo, doctor, I'm thinkin' we've seen a' that's to be seen doon here. We would better be getting the body up to the car."

"I'll go back and have a look at the painting," said Wimsey, "unless I can help you with the lifting. I don't want to be in the way."

"Nay, nay," said the Sergeant. "Thank you for the offer, my lord, but we can manage fine by oorsel's."

The Sergeant and a constable bent over and seized the body. Wimsey waited to see that they required no assistance, and then scrambled up to the top of the bank again.

He gave his first attention to the picture. It was blocked in with a free and swift hand, and lacked the finishing touches, but it was even so a striking piece of work, bold in its masses

and chiaroscuro, and strongly laid on with the knife. It showed a morning lighting—he remembered that Campbell had been seen painting a little after 10 o'clock. The grey stone bridge lay cool in the golden light, and the berries of a rowan-tree, good against witchcraft, hung yellow and red against it, casting splashes of red reflection upon the brown and white of the tumbling water beneath. Up on the left, the hills soared away in veil on veil of misty blue to meet the hazy sky. And splashed against the blue stood the great gold splendour of the bracken, flung in by spadefuls of pure reds and yellows.

Idly, Wimsey picked up the palette and painting-knife which lay upon the stool. He noticed that Campbell used a simple palette of few colours, and this pleased him, for he liked to see economy of means allied with richness of result. On the ground was an aged satchel, which had evidently seen long service. Rather from habit than with any eye to deduction, he made an inventory of its contents.

In the main compartment he found a small flask of whiskey, half-full, a thick tumbler and a packet of bread and cheese, eight brushes, tied together with a dejected piece of linen which had once been a handkerchief but was now dragging out a dishonoured existence as a paint-rag, a dozen loose brushes, two more painting-knives and a scraper. Cheek by jowl with these were a number of tubes of paint. Wimsey laid them out side by side on the granite, like a row of little corpses.

There was a half-pound tube of vermilion spectrum, new, clean and almost unused, a studio-size tube of ultramarine No. 2, half-full, another of chrome yellow, nearly full, and another of the same, practically empty. Then came a half-pound tube of viridian, half-full, a studio-size cobalt three-quarters empty, and then an extremely dirty tube, with its

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label gone, which seemed to have survived much wear and tear without losing much of its contents. Wimsey removed the cap and diagnosed it as crimson lake. Finally, there was an almost empty studio-size tube of rose madder and a half-pound lemon yellow, partly used and very dirty.

Wimsey considered this collection for a moment, and then dived confidently into the satchel again. The large compartment, however, yielded nothing further except some dried heather, a few shreds of tobacco and a quantity of crumbs, and he turned his attention to the two smaller compartments.

In the first of these was, first, a small screw of grease-proof paper on which brushes had been wiped; next, a repellent little tin, very sticky about the screw-cap, containing copal medium; and, thirdly, a battered dipper, matching the one attached to the palette.

The third and last compartment of the satchel offered a more varied bag. There was a Swan vesta box, filled with charcoal, a cigarette-tin, also containing charcoal and a number of sticks of red chalk, a small sketch-book, heavily stained with oil, three or four canvas-separators, on which Wimsey promptly pricked his fingers, some wine-corks and a packet of Gold Flakes.

Wimsey's air of idleness had left him. His long and inquisitive nose seemed to twitch like a rabbit's as he turned the satchel upside down and shook it, in the vain hope of extracting something more from its depths. He rose, and searched the easel and the ground about the stool very carefully.

A wide cloak of a disagreeable check pattern lay beside the easel. He picked it up and went deliberately through the pockets. He found a pen-knife, with one blade broken, half a biscuit, another packet of cigarettes, a box of matches,

a handkerchief, two trout-casts in a transparent envelope, and a piece of string.

He shook his head. None of these was what he wanted. He searched the ground again, casting like a hound on the trail, and then, still dissatisfied, began to lower himself gingerly down the smooth face of the rock. There were crannies here into which something might have fallen, clumps of bracken and heather, prickly roots of gorse. He hunted and felt about in every corner, stabbing his fingers again at every move and swearing savagely. Small fragments of gorse worked their way up his trouser-legs and into his shoes. The heat was stifling. Close to the bottom he slipped, and did the last yard or so on his hindquarters, which irritated him. At a shout from the top of the bank he looked up. The Sergeant was grinning down at him.

"Reconstructing the accident, my lord?"

"Not exactly," said Wimsey. "Here, wait just a moment, will you?"

He scrambled up again. The corpse was now laid as decently as possible on a stretcher, awaiting removal.

"Have you searched his pockets?" panted Wimsey.

"Not yet, my lord. Time enough for that at the station. It's purely a formality, ye ken."

"No, it's not," said Wimsey. He pushed his hat back and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "There's something funny about this, Dalziel. That is, there may be. Do you mind if I go over his belongings now?"

"Not at all, not at all," said Dalziel, heartily. "There's no sic a great hurry. We may as weel dew't first as last."

Wimsey sat down on the ground beside the stretcher, and the Sergeant stood by with a notebook to chronicle the finds.

The right-hand coat pocket contained another handkerchief, a Hardy catalogue, two crumpled bills and an object

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which caused the Sergeant to exclaim laughingly, "What's this, lip-stick?"

"Nothing so suggestive," said Wimsey, sadly, "it's a holder for lead-pencil—made in Germany, to boot. Still, if that's there, there might be something else."

The left-hand pocket, however, produced nothing more exciting than a corkscrew and some dirt; the breast-pocket, only an Ingersoll watch, a pocket comb and a half-used book of stamps; and Wimsey turned, without much hope, to the trouser-pockets, for the dead man wore no waistcoat.

Here, on the right, they found a quantity of loose cash, the notes and coins jumbled carelessly together, and a bunch of keys on a ring. On the left, an empty match-box and a pair of folding nail-scissors. In the hip-pocket, a number of dilapidated letters, some newspaper cuttings and a small notebook with nothing in it.

Wimsey sat up and stared at the Sergeant.

"It's not here," he said, "and I don't like the look of it at all, Dalziel. Look here, there's just one possibility. It may have rolled down into the water. For God's sake get your people together and hunt for it—now. Don't lose a minute."

Dalziel gazed at this excitable Southerner in some astonishment, and the constable pushed back his cap and scratched his head.

"What would we be lookin' for?" he demanded, reasonably.

(Here Lord Peter Wimsey told the Sergeant what he was to look for and why, but as the intelligent reader will readily supply these details for himself, they are omitted from this page.)

"It'll be important, then, to your way o' thinking," said Dalziel, with the air of a man hopefully catching, through a forest of obscurity, the first, far-off glimmer of the obvious.

"Important?" said Wimsey. "Of course it's important. Incredibly, urgently, desperately important. Do you think I should be sliding all over your infernal granite making a blasted pincushion of myself if it wasn't important?"

This argument seemed to impress the Sergeant. He called his forces together and set them to search the path, the bank and the burn for the missing object. Wimsey, meanwhile, strolled over to a shabby old four-seater Morris, which stood drawn well up on the grass at the beginning of the sheep-track.

"Ay," said Constable Ross, straightening his back and sucking his fingers, preliminary to a further hunt among the prickles, "yon's his car. Maybe ye'll find what ye're wantin' in it, after all."

"Don't you believe it, laddie," said Wimsey. Nevertheless, he subjected the car to a careful scrutiny, concentrated for the most part upon the tonneau. A tarry smear on the back cushions seemed to interest him particularly. He examined it carefully with a lens, whistling gently the while. Then he searched further and discovered another on the edge of the body, close to the angle behind the driver's seat. On the floor of the car lay a rug, folded up. He shook it out and looked it over from corner to corner. Another patch of grit and tar rewarded him.

Wimsey pulled out a pipe and lit it thoughtfully. Then he hunted in the pockets of the car till he found an ordnance map of the district. He climbed into the driver's seat, spread out the map on the wheel, and plunged into meditation.

Presently the Sergeant came back, very hot and red in the face, in his shirt-sleeves.

"We've searched high and low," he said, stooping to wring the water from his trouser-legs, "but we canna find it. Maybe ye'll be tellin' us now why the thing is so important."

"Oh?" said Wimsey. "You look rather warm, Dalziel. I've cooled off nicely, sitting here. It's not there, then?"

"It is not," said the Sergeant, with emphasis.

"In that case," said Wimsey, "you had better go to the coroner—no, of course, you don't keep coroners in these parts. The Procurator-Fiscal is the lad. You'd better go to the Fiscal and tell him the man's been murdered."

"Murdered?" said the Sergeant.

"Yes," said Wimsey, "och, ay; and likewise hoots! Murrderrrt is the word."

"Eh!" said the Sergeant. "Here, Ross!"

The constable came up to them at a slow gallop.

"Here's his lordship," said the Sergeant, "is of opeenion the man's been murdered."

"Is he indeed?" said Ross. "Ay, imph'm. And what would bring his lordship to that conclusion?"

"The rigidity of the corpse," said Wimsey, "the fact that you can't find what you're looking for, these smears of tar on the Morris, and the character of the deceased. He was a man anybody might have felt proud to murder."

"The rigidity of the corpse, now," said Dalziel. "That'll be a matter for Dr. Cameron."

"I confess," said the doctor, who had now joined them, "that has been puzzling me. If the man had not been seen alive just after 10 o'clock this morning, I would have said he had been nearer twelve hours dead."

"So should I," said Wimsey. "On the other hand, you'll notice that that painting, which was put on with a quick-

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drying copal medium, is still comparatively wet, in spite of the hot sun and the dry air."

"Ay," said the doctor. "So I am forced to the conclusion that the chill of the water produced early rigor."

"I do not submit to force," said Wimsey. "I prefer to believe that the man was killed about midnight. I do not believe in that painting. I do not think it is telling the truth. I know that it is absolutely impossible for Campbell to have been working here on that painting this morning."

"Why so?" inquired the Sergeant.

"For the reasons I gave you before," said Wimsey. "And there's another small point—not very much in itself, but supporting the same conclusion. The whole thing looks—and is meant to look—as though Campbell had got up from his painting, stepped back to get a better view of his canvas, missed his footing and fallen down. But his palette and painting-knife were laid down on his stool. Now it's far more likely that, if he were doing that, he would have kept his palette on his thumb and his knife or brush in his hand, ready to make any little extra touch that was required. I don't say he might not have laid them down. I only say it would have looked more natural if we had found the palette beside the body and the knife half-way down the slope."

"Ay," said Ross. "I've seen 'em dew that. Steppin' back wi' their eyes half-shut and then hoppin' forward wi' the brush as if they was throwin' darts."

Wimsey nodded.

"It's my theory," he said, "that the murderer brought the body here this morning in Campbell's own car. He was wearing Campbell's soft hat and that foul plaid cloak of his so that anybody passing by might mistake him for Campbell. He had the body on the floor of the tonneau and on top of it he had a push-cycle, which has left tarry marks on the

cushions. Tucked in over the whole lot he had this rug, which has tar-marks on it too. Then I think he dragged out the corpse, carried it up the sheep-track on his shoulders and tumbled it into the burn. Or possibly he left it lying on the top of the bank, covered with the rug. Then, still wearing Campbell's hat and cloak, he sat down and faked the picture. When he had done enough to create the impression that Campbell had been here painting, he took off the cloak and hat, left the palette and knife on the seat and went away on his push-bike. It's a lonely spot, here. A man might easily commit a dozen murders, if he chose his time well."

"That's a verra interesting theory," said Dalziel.

"You can test it," said Wimsey. "If anybody saw Campbell this morning to speak to, or close enough to recognise his face, then, of course, it's a wash-out. But if they only saw the hat and cloak, and especially if they noticed anything bulky in the back of the car with a rug over it, then the theory stands. Mind you, I don't say the bicycle is absolutely necessary to the theory, but it's what I should have used in the murderer's place. And if you'll look at this smear of tar under the lens, I think you'll see traces of the tread of a tyre."

"I'll no say ye're no richt," said Dalziel.

"Very well," said Wimsey. "Now let's see what our murderer has to do next." He flapped the map impressively, and the two policemen bent their heads over it with him.

"Here he is," said Wimsey, "with only a bicycle to help or hinder him, and he's got to establish some sort of an alibi. He may not have bothered about anything very complicated, but he'd make haste to dissociate himself from this place as quickly as possible. And I don't fancy he'd be anxious to show himself in Newton-Stewart or Creetown. There's nowhere much for him to go northward—it only takes him

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up into the hills round Larg and the Rhinns of Kells. He could go up to Glen Trool, but there's not much point in that; he'd only have to come back the same way. He might, of course, follow the Cree back on the eastern bank as far as Minniegaff, avoiding Newton-Stewart, and strike across country to New Galloway, but it's a long road and keeps him hanging about much too close to the scene of the crime. In my opinion, his best way would be to come back to the road and go northwest by Bargrennan, Cairnderry, Creeside and Drumbain, and strike the railway at Barrhill. That's about nine or ten miles by road. He could do it, going briskly, in an hour, or, as it's a rough road, say an hour and a half. Say he finished the painting at 11 o'clock, that brings him to Barrhill at 12.30. From there he could get a train to Stranraer and Port Patrick, or even to Glasgow, or, of course, if he dumped the bicycle, he might take a motor-bus to somewhere. If I were you, I'd have a hunt in that direction."

The Sergeant glanced at his colleagues and read approval in their eyes.

"And whae d'ye think, my lord, wad be the likeliest pairson to hae committed the crime?" he inquired.

"Well," said Wimsey, "I can think of half a dozen people with perfectly good motives. But the murderer's got to be an artist, and a clever one, for that painting would have to pass muster as Campbell's work. He must know how to drive a car, and he must possess, or have access to, a bicycle. He must be fairly hefty, to have carried the body up here on his back, for I see no signs of dragging. He must have been in contact with Campbell after 9.15 last night, when I saw him leave the McClellan Arms alive and kicking. He must know the country and the people pretty well, for he obviously knew that Campbell lived alone with only a charwoman coming in, so that his early morning departure would sur-

prise nobody. He either lives in the same way himself, or else had a very good excuse for being up and out before breakfast this morning. If you find a man who fulfils all these conditions, he's probably the right one. His railway-ticket, if he took one, ought to be traceable. Or it's quite possible I may be able to put my finger on him myself, working on different lines and with rather less exertion."

"Och, weel," said the Sergeant, "if ye find him, ye'll let us know."

"I will," said Wimsey, "though it will be rather unpleasant, because ten to one he'll be some bloke I know and like much better than Campbell. Still, it doesn't do to murder people, however offensive they may be. I'll do my best to bring him in captive to my bow and spear—if he doesn't slay me first."

CHAPTER III

FERGUSON

ON HIS WAY BACK TO KIRKCUDBRIGHT, IT OCCURRED TO Wimsey that it was more than time for tea, and further, that it would be a good idea to visit Campbell's cottage. He accordingly pulled up at the Anwoth Hotel, and, while voraciously filling himself up with potato-scones and ginger-cake, made out a rough list of possible suspects.

At the end of the meal, the list stood as follows:

Living in Kirkcudbright:—

1. Michael Waters—28—5 foot 10 inches—unmarried—living in lodgings with private latch-key—landscape painter—boasts of being able to counterfeit Campbell's style—quarrelled with Campbell previous night and threatened to break his neck.

2. Hugh Farren—35—5 foot 9 inches—figure and landscape painter—particularly broad in the shoulder—married—known to be jealous of Campbell—lives alone with a wife who is apparently much attached to him.

3. Matthew Gowan—46—6 foot 1 inch—figure and landscape painter, also etcher—unmarried—house with servants—wealthy—known to have been publicly insulted by Campbell—refuses to speak to him.

Living in Gatehouse-of-Fleet:—

4. Jock Graham—36—5 foot 11 inches—unmarried—staying at Anwoth Hotel—portrait painter—keen fisherman—reckless—known to be carrying on a feud with Campbell

and to have ducked him in the Fleet after being assaulted by him.

5. Henry Strachan—38—6 foot 2 inches—married—one child, one servant—portrait painter and illustrator—secretary of golf-club—known to have quarrelled with Campbell and turned him off the golf-course.

The list had reached this stage when the landlord of the hotel came in. Wimsey gave him the latest news of the Campbell affair, without, however, referring to the murder theory, and remarked that he thought of running along to Campbell's house, to see if anything was known there about his movements.

"I doot ye'll no be hearin' much there," said the landlord. "Mrs. Green that does his work is away home, but she knows juist naething at a', except that when she arrived this mornin' at 8 o'clock to put the place in order, he had went oot. And Mr. Ferguson that lives next him was away to Glasgow by the first train."

"Ferguson?" said Wimsey. "I think I've met him. Didn't he do those mural paintings for the town hall at some place or other?"

"Ay, he's a verra gude penter. Ye'll have seen him gaun aboot in his wee Austin. He has the stujo next to Campbell's every summer."

"Is he married?"

"Ay, but his wife's away the noo, visitin' wi' friends in Edinbro'. I believe they du not get on so verra weel tegither."

"Who, Ferguson and Campbell?"

"No, no, Ferguson and Mrs. Ferguson. But the ither's true, too. He and Campbell had an awfu' quarrel aboot a bit wall of Ferguson's that Campbell knocked down wi' his car."

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"I wonder if there is a single person in the Stewartry that Campbell didn't have a row with," thought Wimsey, and made an addition to his list:—

6. John Ferguson—about 36—about 5 foot 10 inches—grass-widower—landscape and figures—row about a wall.

"By the way," he went on, "is Jock Graham anywhere about?"

"Och, Jock—he's away oot. He didna come hame last nicht at a'. He said he might be fishin' up at Loch Trool."

"Oho!" said Wimsey. "Up at Loch Trool, is he? How did he go?"

"I couldna say. I think the factor had invitit him. He'll ha' spent last nicht in Newton-Stewart, maybe, and went up wi' the factor in the mornin'. Or he will ha' been fishin' the loch all nicht."

"Will he, though?" said Wimsey. This put a new complexion on the matter. An active man might have driven the body up to the Minnoch and walked back to Newton-Stewart in time to keep his appointment, if that appointment was not an early one. But it would have to be, of course, for a day's fishing, and Jock Graham liked to work by night.

"Will he be back to-night, Joe?"

"I couldna say at all," said the landlord, scattering his hopes at a blow. "They'll maybe tak' twae nchts if the fishin's gude."

"H'm!" said Wimsey. "And very nice, too. Well, I'll be getting on."

He paid his bill and came downstairs, accompanied by the landlord.

"How's Andy?" he asked, casually.

"Och, fine," said the other. "He's in a great way, though,

to-day. Some fellow's pinched his push-bike. An' the worst is, he had juist fitted it wi' new tyres on both wheels."

Wimsey, with his thumb on the self-starter, paused, electrified.

"How's that?"

"It's his ain fault. He will go leavin' it aboot the place. It'll be some o' these trampin' fellows that sells carpets, verra like. There's naebody in Gatehouse wad du sic a thing."

"When did he miss it?"

"This mornin', when he was aff to schule. It's a gude thing it wasna the motor-bike he's always after me to be givin' him."

"I daresay somebody's just borrowed it," said Wimsey.

"That's so. It may turn up yet. Well, gude day to your lordship."

Wimsey did not cross the bridge, but turned up the road to the railway station. He passed the turning on the left leading past Anwoth Old Kirk to the Creetown road, and followed the course of the Fleet till he came to a small lane on the right. At the end of this stood two little detached cottages, side by side, looking over a deep pool—in fact, the famous disputed pool in which Jock Graham had ducked the deceased Campbell.

Under normal circumstances, Wimsey would have expected to find both doors confidingly on the latch, but to-day the lower cottage, which was Campbell's, had been locked—probably by the police. Wimsey peered in through all the ground-floor windows in turn. Everything seemed peaceful and in order as the charwoman had left it that morning. There was a sitting-room of bachelor appearance in front and a kitchen behind—the usual but and ben with a bedroom over. In addition, a glass-roofed studio had been built out beyond the kitchen. At the right-hand side, the

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shed that had housed the Morris stood empty, a fresh set of tyre-tracks in the dust showing where the car had been taken out that morning. Just beyond, a wooden gate led into an untidy little garden. From the end of the studio a party-wall of rough stone ran down, separating the yard and garden from those belonging to the other cottage, and Wimsey noticed a breach in the wall and the pile of débris which marked where Campbell had backed injudiciously while turning into the garage, and given cause for so much un-neighbourly feeling.

Ferguson's cottage was the mirror-image of Campbell's, but his garden was neatly cared-for, and his garage was brand-new and built, regrettably, of corrugated iron. Wimsey pushed open the door and was confronted by a new and shining two-seater of a popular type.

This surprised him for a moment. Ferguson had taken the early train to Glasgow, and Gatehouse Station is six and a half miles from the town. Why had Ferguson not taken the car? He could easily have left it at the station till his return. It appeared to be a new toy; perhaps he had not cared to leave it in strange hands? Or perhaps he meant to be away a long time? Or perhaps ——?

Wimsey lifted the bonnet thoughtfully. Yes, that was the explanation. A gap and some loose connections showed that the magneto had been taken away. Quite probably Ferguson had carried it off with him to Glasgow for repairs. How, then, had Ferguson got to the station? A friendly lift? The 'bus? Or a bicycle? The simplest way was to go and ask. At a small country station no passenger goes unnoticed, and one might as well make sure that Ferguson really had travelled by that train.

Wimsey closed the bonnet and shut the garage-door carefully after him. The house-door was open and he walked

in and glanced round. It was as neat and non-committal as any house could be. Everything had been swept, dusted and tidied up by Mrs. Green, including the contents of the studio; for when the artist is away the charwoman will always play among the paint-pots, and no amount of remonstrance will prevent it. Wimsey glanced at some figure-studies piled against the wall, squinted up his eyes at an elaborate and mannered piece of decorative landscape on the easel, noted casually that Ferguson got his painting materials from Roberson's, glanced along a row of detective novels on the sitting-room bookshelf, and tried the lid of the writing-bureau. It was unlocked, and disclosed an orderly row of pigeon-holes, with everything in its place. Wimsey put down Ferguson as a man of an almost morbidly exact mentality. There was nothing here to throw any light on Campbell's death, but he became all the more anxious to get hold of Ferguson. The way in which the cottages were built, detached and sharing one common entrance yard, ensured that everything which was done in the one could be overlooked from the other. If anything unusual had happened to Campbell the previous night, Ferguson could scarcely have failed to see something of it. And, on the other hand, if Ferguson had not seen it, then nobody had, for the two little houses stood remote from all other neighbours, hidden at the bottom of the rough, leafy lane, with the Water of Fleet lipping by at the bottom of the gardens. If Jock Graham, indeed, had been fishing Standing-Stone Pool that night—but no! He was supposed to have gone to Loch Trool. Ferguson was the man. It would be advisable to get quickly upon the track of Ferguson.

Wimsey went back to his car and started away up the long hill road to Gatehouse Station, which lies at the edge of the Galloway hill-country, looking away over the Fleet

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Valley and the viaduct and frowned on by the lofty scarp of the Clints of Dromore.

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The railway-station at Gatehouse is approached by one of those gates so numerous in the Border Country, which provide some slight restraint upon straying cattle but to the impatient motorist appear an unmitigated nuisance. As usual, however, at this point, an obliging old gentleman emerged from the little group of cottages by the wayside and let Wimsey through.

Immediately beyond the gate, the road branches right and left into a rough, stony track, of which the left-hand side goes deviously down to Creetown, while the right-hand side wanders away to Dromore and ends abruptly at the railway viaduct. Wimsey crossed this road and kept straight on down a steep little approach, heavily masked by rhododendrons, which brought him to the station.

The line from Castle-Douglas to Stranraer is a single one, but boasts of two sets of rails at Gatehouse Station, for the better convenience of passengers and to allow of the passing of trains. Wimsey approached the station-master, who was profiting by a slack period between two trains to study the *Glasgow Bulletin* in his office.

"I've been trying to find Mr. Ferguson," said Wimsey, after the usual greetings, "to fix up a fishing-party at Loch Skerrow, but I'm told he went away this morning by the 9.8. Is that so?"

"Ay, that is so. I saw him mysel'."

"I wonder when he'll be back. Was he going to Glasgow, do you know, or only to Dumfries?"

"He mentioned he was gaun to Glasgow," said the

station-master, "but he'll maybe be back the nicht. Angus here will be able to tell ye if he took a return ticket."

The booking-clerk, who shared the station-master's office, remembered Mr. Ferguson very well, because he had taken a first-class return to Glasgow, an extravagance somewhat unusual among the artist community.

"But of course," said Wimsey, "the ticket is available for three months. He's not bound to return to-day. Did he leave his car here, I wonder?"

"He didna come by car," said the clerk. "He tell't me the magneto was broken down, and he was obliged to take the train from here, instead o' drivin' to Dumfries."

"Oh, then he bicycled up, I suppose," said Wimsey, carelessly.

"Nay," said the station-master, "he'll have come with Campbell's 'bus. He arrived aboot that time, did he no, Angus?"

"He did that. He was talkin' with Rabbie McHardy when he came in. He'll maybe have told him how long he thocht to be stayin' in Glasgow."

"Thanks," said Wimsey. "I'll have a word with Rabbie. I wanted to charter a boat for to-morrow, but if Ferguson isn't going to be back, it's not much use, is it?"

He chatted for a few minutes more, giving them a suitably censored account of the Campbell affair, and then took his leave. He had not got very much farther, except that he seemed to have more or less eliminated Ferguson from his list of suspects. He would have to check him up, of course, and see that he really had arrived in Glasgow. This might present a little difficulty, but it was merely routine-work for Dalziel and his myrmidons.

Wimsey looked at his watch. Jock Graham was at present the most promising candidate for criminal honours, but since

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he had disappeared, there was nothing to be done about him for the present. There was, however, still time to go and interview Strachan, and so round off his inquiries in Gatehouse.

CHAPTER IV

STRACHAN

STRACHAN LIVED IN A PLEASANT, MIDDLE-SIZED HOUSE handily situated for him a little way out of Gatehouse on the road that goes up to the golf-course. The neat maid who came to the door smiled kindly upon the visitor and said that the master was at home and would his lordship please step in.

His lordship stepped accordingly into the sitting-room, where he found Mrs. Strachan seated by the window instructing her small daughter Myra in the art of plain knitting.

Wimsey apologised for calling just before dinner, and explained that he wanted to fix up with Strachan about a foursome.

"Well, I don't quite know," said Mrs. Strachan, a trifle doubtfully. "I don't think Harry is likely to be playing for a day or two. He's had rather a tiresome—oh, well! I really don't know. Myra, dear, run and tell Daddy Lord Peter Wimsey is here and wants to talk to him. You know, I never like to make any sort of arrangements for Harry—I *always* manage to put my foot in it."

She giggled—she was rather a giggly woman at the best of times. Nervousness, Wimsey supposed. Strachan had an abrupt manner which tended to make people nervous, and Wimsey more than suspected him of being a bit of a domestic tyrant.

He said something vague about not wanting to be a nuisance.

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"Of *course* not," said Mrs. Strachan, keeping an uneasy eye on the door, "how *could* you be a nuisance? We're always so *delighted* to see you. And what have you been doing with yourself this beautiful day?"

"I've been up to the Minnoch to see the body," said Wimsey, cheerfully.

"The body?" cried Mrs. Strachan, with a little squeal. "How dreadful that sounds! What *do* you mean? A salmon, or something?"

"No, no," said Wimsey. "Campbell—Sandy Campbell—haven't you heard?"

"No, what?" Mrs. Strachan opened her large baby-blue eyes very wide indeed. "Has anything happened to Mr. Campbell?"

"Good Lord," said Wimsey, "I thought everybody knew. He's dead. He tumbled into the Minnoch and got killed."

Mrs. Strachan gave a shrill shriek of horror.

"Killed? How perfectly dreadful! Was he drowned?"

"I don't quite know," said Wimsey. "I think he bashed his head in, but he may have been drowned as well."

Mrs. Strachan shrieked again.

"When did it happen?"

"Well," said Wimsey, cautiously, "they found him about lunch-time."

"Good gracious! And we never knew anything about it. Oh, Harry"—as the door opened—"what *do* you think? Lord Peter says poor Mr. Campbell has been killed up at the Minnoch!"

"Killed?" said Strachan. "What do you mean, Milly? Who killed him?"

Mrs. Strachan shrieked a third time, more loudly.

"Of course I don't mean that, Harry. How absurd and

how horrible! He fell down and cut his head open and got drowned."

Strachan came forward rather slowly and greeted Wimsey with a nod.

"What's all this about, Wimsey?"

"It's perfectly true," said Wimsey. "They found Campbell's dead body in the Minnoch at 2 o'clock. Apparently he had been painting and slipped over the edge of the granite and cracked his skull on the stones."

He spoke a little absently. It was surely not his fancy that his host looked exceedingly pale and upset, and now, as Strachan turned his face round into the full light of the window, it was obvious that he was suffering from a black eye—a very handsome and well-developed black eye, rich in colour and full in contour.

"Oh!" said Strachan. "Well, I'm not surprised, you know. That's a very dangerous spot. I told him so on Sunday, and he called me a fool for my pains."

"Why, was he up there on Sunday?" said Wimsey.

"Yes, making a sketch or something. You remember, Milly, just on the other side of the burn from where we were picnicking."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Strachan, "was *that* the place? Oo! how perfectly horrid! I'll never go there again, never. You may say what you like. Wild horses wouldn't drag me."

"Don't be ridiculous, Milly. Of course you needn't go there if you don't want to."

"I should always be afraid of Myra falling in and being killed," said Mrs. Strachan.

"Very well, then," said her husband, impatiently. "Don't go there. That settles that. How did all this happen, Wimsey?"

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Lord Peter told the story again, with such detail as he thought desirable.

"That's exactly like Campbell," said Strachan. "He walks about—that is, he used to walk about—with his eyes on his canvas and his head in the air, never looking in the least where he was going. I shouted out to him on Sunday to be careful—he couldn't hear what I said, or pretended he couldn't, and I actually took the trouble to fag round to the other side of the stream and warn him what a slippery place it was. However, he was merely rude to me, so I left it at that. Well, he's done it once too often, that's all."

"Oh, don't speak in that unfeeling tone," exclaimed Mrs. Strachan. "The poor man's dead, and though he wasn't a very nice man, one can't help feeling sorry about it."

Strachan had the grace to mutter that he *was* sorry, and that he never wished any harm to the fellow. He leaned his forehead on his hand, as if his head was aching badly.

"You seem to have been in the wars a bit yourself," remarked Wimsey.

Strachan laughed.

"Yes," he said, "most ridiculous thing. I was up on the golf-course after breakfast when some putrid fool sliced a ball about a thousand miles off the fairway and got me slap-bang in the eye."

Mrs. Strachan gave another small squeak of surprise.

"Oh!" she said, and then subsided swiftly as Strachan turned his parti-coloured eyes warningly upon her.

"How tiresome," said Wimsey. "Who was the blighter?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," replied Strachan, carelessly. "I was completely knocked out for the moment, and when I pulled myself together again and went to spy out the land, I only saw a party of men making off in the distance. I felt too rotten to bother about it. I simply made tracks

for the club-house and a drink. I've got the ball, though—a Silver King. If anybody comes to claim it I shall tell him where he gets off."

"It's a nasty knock," said Wimsey, sympathetically. "A beautiful specimen of its kind, but uncommonly painful, I expect. It's come up nicely, hasn't it? When exactly did you get it?"

"Oh, quite early," said Strachan. "About 9 o'clock, I should think. I went and lay down in my room at the club-house all morning, I felt so rotten. Then I came straight home, so that's why I hadn't heard about Campbell. Dash it all, this means a funeral, I suppose. It's a bit awkward. In the ordinary way we should send a wreath from the Club, but I don't quite know what to do under the circumstances, because last time he was here I told him to send in his resignation."

"It's a nice little problem," said Wimsey. "But I think I should send one, all the same. Shows a forgiving spirit and all that. Keep your vindictiveness for the person who damaged your face. Whom were you playing with, by the way? Couldn't he have identified the assassin?"

Strachan shook his head.

"I was just having a practice round against bogey," he said. "I caddied for myself, so there were no witnesses."

"Oh, I see. Your hands look a bit knocked about, too. You seem to have spent a good bit of your time in the rough. Well, I really came in to ask you to make up a foursome to-morrow with Waters and Bill Murray and me, but I don't suppose you'll, so to speak, feel that your eye is in just yet awhile?"

"Hardly," said Strachan, with a grim smile.

"Then I'll be popping off," said Wimsey, rising.

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"Cheerio, Mrs. Strachan. Cheerio, old man. Don't bother to see me off the premises. I know my way out."

Strachan, however, insisted on accompanying him as far as the gate.

At the corner of the road Wimsey overtook Miss Myra Strachan and her nurse taking an evening stroll. He stopped the car and asked if they would like a little run.

Myra accepted gleefully, and her attendant made no objection. Wimsey took the child up beside him, packed the nurse into the back seat and urged the Daimler Double-Six to show off her best paces.

Myra was delighted.

"Daddy never goes as fast as this," she said, as they topped the tree-hung rise by Cally Lodge and sailed like an aeroplane into the open country.

Wimsey glanced at the speedometer-needle, which was flickering about the 85 mark, and took the corner on a spectacular skid.

"That's a fine black eye your Dad's got," he remarked.

"Yes, isn't it? I asked him if he'd been fighting, and he told me not to be impertinent. I like fighting. Bobby Craig gave *me* a black eye once. But I made his nose bleed, and they had to send his suit to the cleaners."

"Young women oughtn't to fight," said Wimsey, reprovingly, "not even modern young women."

"Why not? I like fighting. Oo! look at the cows!"

Wimsey trod hastily on the brake and reduced the Daimler to a ladylike crawl.

"All the same, I believe he *was* fighting," said Myra. "He never came home last night, and Mummy was ever so frightened. She's afraid of our car, you know, because it goes so fast, but it doesn't go as fast as yours. Does that cow want to toss us?"

"Yes," said Wimsey. "It probably mistakes us for a pancake."

"Silly! Cows don't eat pancakes, they eat oil-cake. I ate some once, but it was very nasty, and I was sick."

"Serve you right," said Wimsey. "I'd better put you down here, or you won't be back by bedtime. Perhaps I'd better run you part of the way home."

"Oh, please do," said Myra. "Then we can drive the cows and make them run like anything."

"That would be very naughty," said Wimsey. "It isn't good for cows to run fast. You are an impertinent, blood-thirsty, greedy and unkind young person, and one of these days you'll be a menace to society."

"How lovely! I could have a pistol and a beautiful evening dress, and lure people to opium-dens and stick them up. I think I'd better marry you, because you've got such a fast car. That would be useful, you see."

"Very," said Wimsey, gravely. "I'll bear the idea in mind. But you might not want to marry me later on, you know."

CHAPTER V

WATERS

IT AMUSED LORD PETER TO LEAD THE SIMPLE LIFE AT KIRK-cudbright. Greatly to the regret of the hotel-keepers, he had this year chosen to rent a small studio at the end of a narrow cobbled close, whose brilliant blue gate proclaimed it to the High Street as an abode of the artistically-minded. His explanation of this eccentric conduct was that it entertained him to watch his extremely correct personal man gutting trout and washing potatoes under an outside tap, and receiving the casual visitor with West End ceremony.

As he clattered down the close, picking his way past the conglomeration of bicycles which almost blocked the entrance, Wimsey perceived this efficient person waiting upon the doorstep with an expression which, though strictly controlled, might almost have been called eager.

"Hullo, Bunter!" said his lordship, cheerfully. "What's for dinner? I'm feeling uncommonly ready for it. There's a beautiful corpse up at Creetown."

"I apprehended, my lord, that your lordship would be engaged in investigation. Not being certain of the exact hour of your lordship's return, I thought it wiser, my lord, to prepare a dish of stewed beef with thick gravy and vegetables, which could, in case of necessity, be kept hot without deterioration."

"Excellent," said his lordship.

"Thank you, my lord. I understand from the butcher that the portion of the animal which I have been accustomed to call shin of beef is termed in these parts the—er—hough."

"I believe you are right, Bunter."

"I did not take the man's word for it," said Bunter, with melancholy dignity. "I inspected the carcass and ascertained that the correct cut was removed from it."

"You are always so thorough," said Wimsey, appreciatively.

"I do my best, my lord. Would your lordship desire me to refer to the comestible as—er—hough—during our residence in this country?"

"It would be a graceful concession to national feeling, Bunter, if you can bring yourself to do it."

"Very good, my lord. I presume that the leg of mutton will again pass under the appellation of jiggot, as on the occasion of your lordship's previous visit?"

"Certainly, Bunter."

"Yes, my lord." Bunter sighed deeply. "Whatever is correct I will endeavour to do to your lordship's satisfaction."

"Thank you, Bunter. We must try to be correct under all circumstances."

"Yes, my lord. Dinner will be served in twenty minutes, as soon as the potatoes are ready."

"Right-ho!" said his lordship. "I'll just run across the close and have a chin-wag with Miss Selby till dinner-time."

"Pardon me, my lord. I understand that the ladies have gone away."

"Gone away?" said Wimsey, rather taken aback.

"Yes, my lord. I was informed by the young person who attends upon them that they had gone away to Glasgow."

"Oh!" said Wimsey, "they're away to Glasgow. But that probably only means that they are out for the day. It does not necessarily imply, as it does down South, that they have packed up bag and baggage and departed on a long visit."

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Well, I'll go and hunt up Mr. Waters. I rather want to see him. I may bring him back to dinner."

"Very good, my lord."

Wimsey crossed the High Street and knocked upon the door of Waters' lodgings. The landlady answered his knock and in reply to his inquiry observed that "Mr. Waters was away just now."

"When will he be back?"

"I couldna say, my lord, but I'm thinkin' he'll be stayin' the nicht in Glasgow."

"Everybody seems to have gone to Glasgow," said Wimsey.

"Och, ay. They'll all have went tae the Exhibition. Mr. Waters was away by the first train."

"What! the 8.45?" said Wimsey, incredulously. From what he had seen of Waters the previous night he had hardly expected such energy.

"Ay," said the landlady, placidly. "He had his breakfast at 8 o'clock and was away with Miss Selby and Miss Cochran."

Wimsey felt rather relieved. He had been afraid for the moment that this early activity might have something a little sinister about it. But, chaperoned by Miss Selby and Miss Cochran, Waters could scarcely have got into mischief. One more of his six suspects seemed to be safely eliminated. He left a message that he would like to see Mr. Waters as soon as he got back and returned to Blue Gate Close.

He had finished his savoury stew, and was enjoying an admirable cheese soufflé, when there was a sound of two pairs of heavy boots labouring over the cobbles, followed by that of a voice inquiring for his lordship.

"Hullo!" said Wimsey, "is that you, Dalziel?"

"Yes, my lord." The Sergeant shouldered his way through

the narrow doorway and stood aside to allow his companion to pass. "I've been reportin' this matter to Sir Maxwell Jamieson, the Chief Constable, an' he has been gude enough to come round wi' me for a word wi' your lordship."

"Splendid!" said Wimsey, heartily. "Delighted to see you both. We haven't met before, Sir Maxwell, but that's not to say I don't know you well by reputation, as, I fancy, you know me. There was a trifling complaint of speeding last year, I believe, in which justice was rather more than tempered with mercy. Have a drink."

"Well," said Dalziel, when Wimsey's proffered hospitality had been accepted, with suitable signs of appreciation, "I've been makin' inquiries along the line in accordance wi' the theory, but I'm no sae verra weel satisfied t'ane way or t'ither. But first of a', I'd have ye ken I've interviewed the folk at Borgan, and they tell me young Jock saw Campbell pentin' there at ten minutes past ten when he gaed oot tae tak' a message to a wumman at Clauchaneasy, and he was still sittin' there when Jock returned at five minutes past eleven. Sae ye see, he couldna ha' left the place till a few minutes past eleven at the airliest."

"When you say he saw Campbell, do you mean that he knew it was Campbell or that he only thought it was?"

"Nay, he disna ken Campbell, but he saw a man in a big black hat and a plaid cloak, like Campbell was wearin'. An' he thinks there was a big plaid or rug liggin' by the side of him."

"Then it may have been the murderer."

"Ay, so it may, but it's the time o' day I wad dra' your attention to. Ye'll admit that, murderer or no murderer, he couldna ha' left yon place till past eleven?"

"That seems clear enough."

"Well, then, we come tae the investigation consairnin'

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the railway. There's no sae many trains in the day between Stranraer and Girvan stops at Pinwherry or Barrhill."

The Sergeant pulled an L.M.S. time-table from his pocket and smacked it out upon the table.

"Let's tak' the trains tae Stranraer first. The murderer nicht verra likely be thinkin' o' escapin' by the boat fra' Stranraer, ye ken, and if so, it's in Ireland we'll have to be lookin' for him."

He pulled out a thick pencil and jotted the times down on a sheet of paper.

	a.m.	p.m.
Girvan	10.45	2.16
Pinmore	11.1	2.31
Pinwherry	11.8	2.39
Barrhill	11.18	2.50
Glenwhilly	11.33	3.6
New Luce	11.41	3.13
Dunragit	11.52	3.26
Castle Kennedy	12 noon	3.33
Stranraer	12.7	3.39

Wimsey shook his head.

"He couldn't catch the first train—not on a bicycle, at any rate. Barrhill is his nearest point, and, if you give him only five minutes to pack his traps and get started, that leaves a bare eight minutes for ten miles or so. It's just conceivable that he might do it by car if he blinded like hell and the train happened to be late, but how could he have got the spare car along? Of course he could have hung about somewhere in the hills and taken the 2.50, or he could have ridden farther and picked the same train up at another station, but that would give him a very poor alibi."

"That's so, my lord," said Dalziel, "I hadna overlookit the possibeelity. Noo, there's a report come in fra' the

station-master at Pinwherry that there was a gentleman tuk the 2.39 at Pinwherry. He paid particular attention to him because he was a stranger and appeared out of the ordinar' nairvous and excited."

"Where did he book to?"

"That's juist the interesting part of the matter. He tuk his teecket to Stranraer ——"

"Why, of course," said Wimsey, with his eye on the time-table. "That explains why he waited for that train. That's the one that makes the connection with the boat to Larne. It's a rotten connection at that—over three hours to wait in Stranraer—but it's apparently the only one there is."

"I was about to tell ye," said the Sergeant, "the gentleman inquired maist anxiously about the connection and seemed sair disappointit to lairn that there was no boat before 7 o'clock."

"That fits in all right," said Wimsey, "though it's queer he didn't find out about the boats earlier, while he was thinking this crime out so carefully. What was this fellow like?"

"Juist a youngish body in a grey suit and soft hat, they tell me, an' carryin' a wee attaché-case. Rather tall than short, wi' a sma' dark moustache. The station-master wad ken him again."

"Did he give any particular account of himself?"

"He said somethin' o' havin' misread the time-table and thocht there was a boat at 3.50."

"Well, that's perfectly possible," said Wimsey. "You see there are three lines at the bottom of the page showing the steamer connections from Stranraer Pier to Larne and Belfast, and just above them, three lines showing the train-connection between Stranraer, Colfin and Port Patrick. It's easy to mistake the one for the other. But look here, Dalziel,

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if there was no boat for him before 7, you must have been in time to catch him."

"That's a fact, my lord, and so soon as I had the report I telephoned through tae the pollis at Stranraer to have a sairch made; but I got their answer juist before comin' over here, and it was tae the effect that there was no sic a pairson on the boat."

"Damn it!" said Wimsey.

"They are conducting an inquiry in Stranraer, in case he should be in hidin' there, and are stoppin' all cars enterin' and leavin' the toon, and naiturally they will keep a strict eye on to-morrow's boat. But it is no unthinkable that the felly isna mekkin' for Larne at a'. That may ha' been juist a blind."

"Did he actually go to Stranraer?"

"It seems so. The teeckets ha' been checkit, and the third-class teecket issued at Pinwherry was duly given up at Stranraer. Unfortunately, the porter whae collectit it is no an obsairvin' body and canna say what like the mon was that handit it tae him."

"Well, you seem to have done pretty well on that part of the business," said Wimsey, "considering the shortness of the time. And it looks as though we really had got on to something. By the way, did the station-master at Pinwherry mention whether the passenger had a bicycle?"

"Nay, he hadna a bicycle. I askit him how he came there, but naebody had noticed him come. It seems he juist walkit intae the station."

"Well, of course, if he was taking the Irish boat, he would probably get rid of the bicycle first. He had plenty of time to hide it up in the hills. Well—that looks rather hopeful. Still, we mustn't rely on it too much. How about the trains in the other direction—the ones going to Glasgow?"

Dalziel turned over a couple of pages, licked the thick pencil and produced a new list.

Stranraer.	a.m. dep. 11.35	p.m. 12.30 (from Stranraer Pier)	p.m. 4.5
Castle Kennedy	11.42	..	4.12
Dunragit	11.52	12.42	4.20
New Luce	12.7 p.m.	...	4.33
Glenwhilly	12.19	..	4.45
Barrhill	12.35	..	5.0
Pinwherry	12.43	..	5.8
Pinmore	12.56	..	5.18
Girvan	{ arr. 1.6	1.37	5.28
	{ dep. 1.11	1.42	5.36

"There are opportunities there, too," said Wimsey. "How about the 12.35? He could catch that easily and go on to Glasgow, and from there he could get anywhere."

"Ay, that's so. That was what I thoct masel'. I telephoned tae the station-master at Barrhill, but there was only four passengers by thet train, an' he knowed them a' pairsonally."

"Oh!" said Wimsey. "I see. That rather puts the lid on that, then."

"Ay. But there's anither thing. I didna rest satisfied wi' that. I pursued my inquiries at the ither stations along the line an' I found there was a gentleman wi' a bicycle tuk the 1.11 train at Girvan."

"Was there, by Jove!" Wimsey pulled out his map of the district and studied it intently.

"It could be done, Dalziel, it could be done! Barrhill is nine miles from the scene of the crime and Girvan is, say, twelve miles further on—call it twenty-one miles altogether. If he started at 11.10 that would give him two hours, which

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means just over ten miles an hour—easy enough for a good cyclist. Was the train punctual, by the way? ”

“ It was. Ay, he could ha’ done it.”

“ Did the station-master give any description of him? ”

“ He said that accordin’ tae the porter he was juist an ordinary gentleman of thirty or forty years of age, in a grey suit and a check cap pu’d weel doon. Clean-shaven, or nearly so, and of middling size, and he was wearin’ big glasses wi’ they tinted lenses.”

“ That’s suspicious,” said Wimsey. “ Would the porter be able to identify him, do you think? ”

“ Ay, I’m thinkin’ he wad. He said the gentleman spoke like an Englishman.”

“ Did he? ” Wimsey considered his six suspects. Waters was a Londoner and spoke standard public-school English. Strachan, though a Scot, habitually spoke with an English accent, having been educated at Harrow and Cambridge. He, however, was a noticeably tall man. It could hardly be he. Gowan was double-tongued; he spoke English with Wimsey and the broadest Scots with the natives—but then, Gowan’s grand silky beard which had never known a razor was pointed out to visitors as one of the local sights of Kirkcudbright. Graham was completely Londonised, and his English would pass muster at Oxford. His astonishing blue eyes were his one really memorable feature—was this the explanation of the tinted glasses? Farren—his Scots tongue was unmistakable; nobody, surely, could mistake him for an Englishman. His whole person was noticeable, too—the wide, ridgy shoulders, tumbling fair hair and queer, light eyes, temperish, pouted mouth and heavy jaw. Ferguson, too, was Scottish in accent, though not in idiom, and in feature might be almost anything.

“ Did the gentleman give any particular account of him-

self?" asked Wimsey, coming rather suddenly out of his abstraction.

"No, he only got tae the station as the train was standin' at the platform, but he said somethin' aboot startin' late fra' Ballantrae. He tuk his ticket for Ayr and the machine was labelled according."

"We may be able to trace that," said Wimsey.

"Ay, that's so. I hae sent an inquiry to Ayr and to Glesga'. They'll maybe remember 't."

"And maybe not," said Wimsey. "Well, now, Dalziel, I also, as the lady said, have not been idle."

He produced his list of suspects.

"Mind you," he said, warningly, "this list may not be complete. But we know the man we are looking for is a painter, which narrows the field considerably. And all these six people are known to have had it in for Campbell in one way or another, though some of the motives may seem pretty inadequate."

The Sergeant peered thoughtfully at the list, and so did Sir Maxwell. The latter's jurisdiction extended over both Kirkcudbrightshire and Wigtownshire, and he knew all the artists more or less well, though not with any great intimacy, his own interests being military and sporting.

"Now," said Wimsey, "two of these people have alibis. Ferguson was duly seen on to the 9.8 from Gatehouse. He had no bicycle with him, and he booked to Glasgow. There's a picture exhibition on there, and no doubt that's what he was making for. Waters also departed for Glasgow by the 8.45 from Kirkcudbright, in company with Miss Selby and Miss Cochran. If they all met at the show they will prove each other's alibis all right. Strachan was out all night and came home at lunch-time with a black eye, and what is more,

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he is telling lies about it." He gave a brief summary of his conversations with Strachan and Myra.

"That looks bad," said Dalziel.

"Yes; we mustn't pin all our faith to the cyclist at Girvan, or even to the mysterious passenger at Pinwherry; they may both be perfectly genuine travellers. Strachan might quite well have been painting up at the Minnoch at 11 o'clock and ridden back to Gatehouse by lunch-time. It's only twenty-seven miles. It would be dangerous, because he might be recognised, but people who commit murders must take a few risks. Besides, he might have hidden his car somewhere on the road the day before, and picked it up on his way back, bringing the bicycle with him. Did I mention to you, by the way, that there's a bicycle disappeared from the Anwoth Hotel at Gatehouse?"

Dalziel shook his head.

"It's a case wi' a great number of possibeelities," he said. "Always supposin' that it *is* a case. We havena got the doctor's opeenion yet."

"That'll come to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Ay. The maitter has been laid before the Fiscal, and there will be a post-mortem examination. There's Campbell's sister expectit the nicht—it seems she's his only relation—an' they'll maybe wait till she has seen the corpse, forbye the licht will be better for the doctor in the mornin'."

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After the Sergeant and his companion had gone, Wimsey remained smoking thoughtfully for some time. He was worried about Waters. He had left him the night before in a dangerous mood. The last train from Glasgow got in to Kirkcudbright at 9.00. If Waters had really gone to see the Exhibition, it was not reasonable to expect him back that

night. He would only have got in to Glasgow at 2.16, and would have had to leave again at 5.30. Nobody would go all that way in order to spend a bare three hours in the town. Except, possibly, to establish an alibi. Could one establish an alibi that way?

Wimsey turned to the time-table again. Kirkcudbright depart 8.45. That was capable of proof by witnesses. Tarff 8.53, Brig-of-Dee 9.2—nothing to be done from there, except by car. Castle-Douglas 9.7. That was different. Castle-Douglas was a junction. From there one might turn back in the direction of Newton-Stewart. Yes. There was a train. This was ridiculous, of course, because Waters had travelled with the two women, but there was no harm in working it out. Castle-Douglas 9.14, Newton-Stewart 10.22. Wimsey breathed a sigh of relief. If the murderer had been seen painting at 10 o'clock, that let out Waters. He could not have got even so far as Newton-Stewart by that time.

But all this depended on the doctor's report. If both Wimsey and he had been mistaken about the rigor—then it was possible that Campbell himself had been painting at the Minnoch till five minutes past eleven. In which case—Wimsey thumbed the time-table again.

In which case a train reaching Newton-Stewart at 10.22 might prove very handy to an intending murderer—supposing the murderer knew already that Campbell meant to paint that day at the Minnoch. A car from Newton-Stewart would bring him to the scene of the crime in twenty minutes—time enough and to spare. And though Waters had no car, such things can be hired. There would be a risk, certainly, for in country districts people know one another, and indeed, who would hire out a driverless car to a man he did not know, without making careful inquiries?

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Yet, if the deposit were big enough, he might take the risk. It would not do to cross Waters off the list too promptly.

At this point Wimsey cursed himself for a fool. It was as certain as anything could be that Waters had travelled peacefully to Glasgow under the eyes of his friends, and would return peacefully with them the next day.

He looked at his watch. It was not possible, of course, that Waters had returned by the 9 o'clock train. Still, it would do no harm to go and see.

He walked along the High Street. There was no light either in Waters' sitting-room or in his bedroom, both of which faced upon the street. The landlady would think him daft if he made any more inquiries. There was Waters' studio—a big converted barn up a turning off the Tongland Road. If he had come back, he certainly would not be working there at this hour. Still, when one is restless, any excuse will serve to take a little walk.

Wimsey made his way past the Castle, up the little flight of steps and over the green by the harbour. The tide was dropping, and the long mud-flats of the estuary glimmered faintly in the pale midsummer night. The yacht that had come in that morning still lay close against the harbour wall, her spars and rigging making a bold foreground of interlaced verticals and horizontals against the galumphing curves of the ugly concrete bridge. Wimsey crossed the open space where the 'buses congregate by day, plunged down the little alley by the gasworks and came out past the station on to the Tongland Road.

Crossing the street, he turned off again to the right and found himself in a happy backwater, with an ancient overshoot water-mill, a few cottages and a wide open space, grassy and forlorn, surrounded by sheds and derelict outbuildings.

Waters' studio was approached by a little winding path among overgrown bushes and lush grass. He pushed open the gate and tried the door. It was locked, and there was no sign of life about the place. The silence was intense. He heard some small animal move in the grass, the plop, plopping from the wooden trough over the paddles of the mill-wheel; far off, somewhere in the town, a dog barked hoarsely.

Wimsey turned to go. As he went, the stony path creaking under his feet, the door of one of the cottages was flung suddenly open, letting a long bar of light stream suddenly across the ground. Framed in the door he saw the silhouette of a woman peering out anxiously into the silvery darkness.

It occurred to Wimsey suddenly that this was Farren's house, and he paused, half-decided to stop and speak. But as he hesitated, somebody laid a hand on the woman's shoulder and drew her in, shutting the door. There had been something quick and stealthy about the action that banished Wimsey's plan, half-formed. The second figure had been a man's, but it was taller and bigger than Farren's. He felt sure that it was not Farren, and that, if he knocked, the door would not open to his knocking.

CHAPTER VI

FARREN

SIR MAXWELL JAMIESON WAS NOT A MAN TO RUSH INTO precipitate action. Sound and cautious, with a reputation for taciturnity, he preferred to know exactly where he stood before committing himself to stirring up scandal by vexatious inquiries. He was not over-pleased to find Wimsey palpitating on his doorstep the next morning, shortly after breakfast, when he himself had barely had time to read the paper.

He was too wise to ignore Wimsey and his theories. He knew that Lord Peter had an uncanny nose for a crime, and that his help was valuable, but he did not care for this English habit of rushing into situations on a high tide of chatter and excitement. It was true that Wimsey had shown a certain amount of tact in coming to him. There was no telephone in Blue Gate Close, and if Wimsey must have the latest intelligence piping hot, it was better that he should apply for it in private than interrogate Sergeant Dalziel over the line in a hotel bar.

But Sir Maxwell was not yet perfectly convinced that there was any murder to be investigated. All this talk about missing objects and bicycles was well enough, but it was a small basis on which to rear so threatening a structure of accusation. Doubtless, if the things were more carefully searched for, they would be found, and the whole murder theory would collapse. Certainly, there was that awkward point about the rigor, but Sir Maxwell, turning over the pages of Taylor and Glaister, felt convinced that it was not possible

to lay down any very exact or reliable laws about the onset of rigor.

He frowned over Wimsey's list of suspects—a disagreeable document, he thought, and savouring strongly of the libellous. All these people were highly respected citizens. Take Gowan, for instance—a leading inhabitant of Kirkcudbright for over fifteen years, well known and well liked, in spite of his small vanities and somewhat overbearing manner. He was wealthy, kept a good house, with an English butler and housekeeper, and owned two cars, with a chauffeur to drive them when required. Was it likely that he would be found knocking his fellow-artists on the head and tumbling them into salmon-rivers in the neighbouring county? What possible motive could he have for it? There had been talk of some disagreement about a picture, but, in Sir Maxwell's experience, artists frequently disagreed about pictures, with no more consequences than a little cold-shouldering or the formation of a clique. Waters, again—a pleasant young man enough, though inclined to irritate his neighbours by his South-country mannerisms. It was unfortunate that he should have fallen out with Campbell, but surely he was not the man to harbour murderous resentment for a hasty word spoken over a drink. And Farren ——

Sir Maxwell paused there, in justice to Wimsey. Where women were concerned, you never knew. Campbell had been rather a frequent visitor at the cottage by the old mill. It was said—there had been talk—threats had been uttered. If there was anything in it, there might be some difficulty in getting at the truth here. Farren's suspicions had probably been quite unfounded, for one could hardly look at Mrs. Farren and believe evil of her. Still, wives will tell lies and provide alibis, even for the most unreasonable of husbands, and indeed, the more virtuous the wife, the more

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obstinate the liar, under such conditions. With considerable discomfort, Sir Maxwell admitted to himself that he could not undertake to say that the Farrens were, in the nature of things, clear of all suspicion.

Then of course there were those people over at Gatehouse. Jock Graham—a harum-scarum, word-and-a-blow fellow if ever there was one. Clever, too. If it came to picking the man with the brains to plan an ingenious crime and the coolness to carry it through, then Graham was the man for his money, every time. Graham had had plenty of practice in the execution of practical jokes, and he could tell a circumstantial lie, looking you square in the eyes with the face of an angel. Ferguson was notoriously on bad terms with his wife. Sir Maxwell knew nothing else to his disadvantage, but he noted it, in his upright Presbyterian mind, as a discreditable fact. Strachan—well, Strachan was secretary of the golf-club and weel-respectit. Surely Strachan, like Gowan, could be ruled out.

The telephone rang. Wimsey pricked up his ears. Sir Maxwell raised the receiver with irritating deliberation. He spoke; then turned to Wimsey.

“It’s Dalziel. You had better listen in on the extension.”

“Is’t you, Sir Maxwell? . . . Ay, we have the doctor’s report. . . . Ay, it supports the theory of murder richt enough. There was nae water in the lungs at a’. The mon was deid before he got intae the burn. ’Twas the scart on the heid that did it. The bone is a’ crushed intae the brain. Och, ay, the wound was made before death, and he must ha’ deid almost immediately. There’s a when mair blows to the heid an’ body, but the doctor thinks some o’ them will ha’ been made after death, wi’ the body pitchin’ doon the burnside an’ washin’ aboot amang the stanes.”

“What about the time of the death?”

"Ay, Sir Maxwell, I was juist comin' to that. The doctor says Campbell will ha' been deid at least six hours when he first saw the body, an' mair likely twelve or thirteen. That'll pit the time o' the murder in the late night or the airly mornin'—at ony rate between midnight and nine o'clock. And a verra suspecious an' corroboratin' circumstance is that the man had nae food in his wame at a'. He was kilt before he had ta'en ony breakfast."

"But," said Wimsey, cutting in on the conversation, "if he had had his breakfast early, it might have passed out of the stomach before lunch-time."

"Ay, that's so. But it wadna ha' passed oot o' him a'te-gither. The doctor says his interior was as toom as a drum, an' he will stake his professional credit he hadna eaten onything sin' the previous night."

"Well, he ought to know," said Wimsey.

"Ay, that's so. That's his lordship speakin', is't no? Your lordship will be gratified by this support for our theory."

"It may be gratifying," said Jamieson, "but I wish very much it hadn't happened."

"That's so, Sir Maxwell. Still, there's little doot it has happened and we maun du the best we can by it. There is another remarkable circumstance, an' that is that we can find no recognisable finger-prints upon the artistic paraphernalia, and it has the appearance as if the user of them had been doin' his pentin' in gloves. An' the steerin'-wheel o' the car is wiped as clean as a whistle. Ay, I'm thinking the case is weel substantiated. Is it your opeenion, Sir Maxwell, that we should mak' the fact o' the murder public? "

"I hardly know, Sergeant. What do you think yourself? Have you consulted with Inspector Macpherson? "

"Weel, sir, he thinks we maun gie some gude reason for makin' our inquiries. . . . Ay, we'll best gae cannily about

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it, but there's folk talkin' a'ready about the quarrel wi' Waters . . . ay, an' wi' Farren . . . ay . . . ay . . . an' there's a story about Strachan bein' over in Creetown the night of the crime speirin' after Farren. . . . I doot we'll no be able to keep the thing hushed up."

"I see. Well, perhaps we had better let it be known that there is a possibility of foul play—that we are not quite satisfied, and so on. But you'd better not tell anybody what the doctor says about the time of the death. I'll be over presently and have a word with the Fiscal. And meanwhile I'll get the Kirkcudbright police on to making a few inquiries."

"Ay, sir, 'twill be best for them to sort it their end. I've a report here fra' Stranraer I'll hae to deal wi' masel'. They've detained a young fellow that was boardin' the Larne boat . . . ay, weel, I'll ring ye again later, Sir Maxwell."

The Chief Constable hung up the receiver, and confronted Wimsey with a dour smile.

"It certainly looks as though you were right," he admitted reluctantly. "But," he added, more cheerfully, "now that they've traced the man at Stranraer, it will probably all be cleared up this morning."

"Maybe," said Wimsey, "but I rather doubt whether the man who fixed that accident up so cleverly would be fool enough to give himself away by making a belated bolt to Ireland. Don't you?"

"That's a fact," said Jamieson. "If he'd wanted to escape he could have taken yesterday morning's boat. And if he wanted to play the innocent, he could do it better at home."

"H'm!" said Wimsey. "I think, you know, the time has come to talk of many things with Farren and Gowan and Waters—only he's disappeared—and, in fact, with all the good people of Kirkcudbright. A little tactful gossip, Sir Maxwell, by a cheerful, friendly, inquisitive bloke like my-

self, may do wonders in a crisis. Nothing unusual in my making my morning round of the studios, is there? Nobody minds me. Why, bless you, I've got some of 'em so tame, they'll let me sit round and watch 'em paint. An official personage like you might embarrass them, don't you know, but there's no dignity about me. I'm probably the least awe-inspiring man in Kirkcudbright. I was born looking foolish and every day in every way I am getting foolisher and foolisher. Why, even you, Chief, let me come here and sit round on your official chairs and smoke a pipe and look on me as nothing more than an amiable nuisance—don't you?"

"There may be something in what you say," agreed Jamieson, "but you'll be discreet, mind. There's no need to mention the word murder."

"None whatever," said Wimsey. "I'll let them mention it first. Well, toodle-oo!"

Wimsey may not have been an awe-inspiring person to look at, but his reception at Farren's house did not altogether justify his boast that "nobody marked him." The door was opened by Mrs. Farren who, at sight of him, fell back against the wall with a gasp which might have been merely of surprise but sounded more like alarm.

"Hullo!" said Wimsey, breezing cheerily over the threshold, "how are you, Mrs. Farren? Haven't seen you for an age—well, since Friday night at Bobbie's, but it seems like an age. Is everything bright and blooming? Where's Farren?"

Mrs. Farren, looking like a ghost painted by Burne-Jones in one of his most pre-Raphaelite moments, extended a chill hand.

"I'm very well, thank you. Hugh's out. Er—won't you come in?"

Wimsey, who was already in, received this invitation in his heartiest manner.

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"Well—that's very good of you. Sure I'm not in the way? I expect you're cooking or something, aren't you?"

Mrs. Farren shook her head and led the way into the little sitting-room with the sea-green and blue draperies and the bowls of orange marigolds.

"Or is it scarves this morning?" Mrs. Farren wove hand-spun wool in rather attractive patterns. "I envy you that job, you know. Sort of Lady of Shalott touch about it. The curse is come upon me, and all that sort of thing. You promised one day to let me have a twirl at the wheel."

"I'm afraid I'm being lazy to-day," said Mrs. Farren, with a faint smile. "I was just—I was only—excuse me one moment."

She went out, and Wimsey heard her speaking to somebody at the back of the house—the girl, no doubt, who came in to do the rough work. He glanced round the room, and his quick eye noted its curiously forlorn appearance. It was not untidy, exactly; it told no open tale of tumult; but the cushions were crushed, a flower or two here and there was wilted; there was a slight film of dust on the window-sill and on the polished table. In the houses of some of his friends this might have meant mere carelessness and a mind above trifles like dust and disorder, but with Mrs. Farren it was a phenomenon full of meaning. To her, the beauty of an ordered life was more than a mere phrase; it was a dogma to be preached, a cult to be practised with passion and concentration. Wimsey, who was imaginative, saw in those faint traces the witness to a night of suspense, a morning of terror; he remembered the anxious figure at the door, and the man—yes. There had been a man there, too. And Farren was away. And Mrs. Farren was a very beautiful woman, if you liked that style of thing, with her oval face and large grey eyes and those thick masses of copper-coloured hair, parted

in the middle and rolled in a great knot on the nape of the neck.

A step passed the window—Jeanie, with a basket on her arm. Mrs. Farren came back and sat down in a high, narrow-backed chair, looking out and past him like a distressed beggar-maid beginning to wonder whether Cophetua was not something of a trial in family life.

"And where," said Wimsey, with obtuse tactlessness, "has Farren disappeared to?"

The large eyes shadowed suddenly with fear or pain.

"He's gone out—somewhere."

"The gay dog," said Wimsey. "Or is he working?"

"I—don't quite know." Mrs. Farren laughed. "You know what this place is. People go off, saying they'll be back to dinner, and then they meet a man, or somebody says the fish are rising somewhere, and that's the last you see of them."

"I know—it's shameful," said Wimsey, sympathetically. "Do you mean he didn't even come home to his grub?"

"Oh—I was only speaking generally. He was home to dinner all right."

"And then barged out afterwards, saying he wanted some Gold Flakes and would be back in ten minutes, I suppose. It's disheartening, isn't it, the way we behave. I'm a shocking offender myself, though my conscience is fairly easy. After all, Bunter is paid to put up with me. It's not as though I had a devoted wife warming my slippers and looking out of the front-door every five minutes to see if I'm going to turn up."

Mrs. Farren drew in her breath sharply.

"Yes, it's terrible, isn't it?"

"Terrible. No, I mean it. I do think it's unfair. After all, one never knows what may happen to people. Look at poor Campbell."

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This time there was no doubt about it. Mrs. Farren gave a gasp of terror that was almost a cry; but she recovered herself immediately.

"Oh, Lord Peter, do tell me, what really *has* happened? Jeanie came in with some dreadful story about his being killed. But she gets so excited, and talks such broad Scotch that I really couldn't make it out."

"It's a fact, I'm afraid," said Wimsey, soberly. "They found him lying in the Minnoch yesterday afternoon, with his head bashed in."

"With his head bashed in? You don't mean ——"

"Well, it's difficult to say quite how it happened. The river is full of rocks just there, you see ——"

"Did he fall in?"

"It looks like it. He was in the water. But he wasn't drowned, the doctor says. It was the blow on the head that did it."

"How dreadful!"

"I wonder you hadn't heard about it before," said Wimsey. "He was a great friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"Well—yes—we knew him very well." She stopped, and Wimsey thought she was going to faint. He sprang up.

"Look here—I'm afraid this has been too much of a shock for you. Let me get some water."

"No—no ——" She flung out a hand to restrain him, but he had already darted across the passage into the studio, where he remembered to have seen a tap and a sink. The first thing he noticed there was Farren's sketching-box, standing open on the table, the paints scattered about and the palette flung down higgledy-piggledy among them. An old painting-coat hung behind the door, and Wimsey inspected it inside and out with some care, but seemed to find nothing in it worthy of attention. He filled a cup at the

tap, with his eyes roving about the room. The studio-easel stood in its place with a half-finished canvas upon it. The small sketching-easel was propped against the sink, strapped up. Farren had not gone out to paint, evidently.

The water, splashing on his hand, reminded him of what he was supposed to be there for. He wiped the cup and turned to leave the studio. As he did so, he caught sight of Farren's fishing-tackle standing in the corner behind the door. Two trout-rods, a salmon-rod, net, gaff, creel and waders. Well, there might be a fourth rod, of course, and one can fish without creel or waders. But, standing there so quietly, the things had a look of settled completeness.

He returned to the sitting-room. Mrs. Farren waved the cup impatiently aside.

"Thank you—I don't need it. I told you I didn't. I'm quite all right." Her worried and sleepless eyes belied her. Wimsey felt that he was being a brute, but somebody would be asking questions soon enough. As well he as the police, he thought.

"Your husband ought to be here soon," he said. "The news will be all over the country by now. It's surprising, really, he hasn't got back already. You don't know at all where he is?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"I mean, I'd gladly take a message or do anything of that sort."

"Why should you? Thank you all the same. But really, Lord Peter, you talk as though the death were in my family. We knew Mr. Campbell very well, of course, but after all, there's no reason for me to be so prostrated as all that. . . . I'm afraid I may sound callous ——"

"Not at all. I only thought you looked a bit upset. I'm very glad you're not. Perhaps I misunderstood ——"

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"Perhaps you did," she said in an exhausted voice. Then she seemed to gather up her spirits a little, and turned upon him almost eagerly.

"I was sorry for Mr. Campbell. He was a bitterly unpopular man, and he felt that more than people ever realised. He had a perpetual grudge against everybody. That's unattractive. And the more you hate everybody for hating you, the more unattractive you grow and the more they go on hating you. I understood that. I didn't like the man. One couldn't. But I tried to be fair. I daresay people did misunderstand. But one can't stop doing what's right because people misunderstand, can one?"

"No," said Wimsey. "If you and your husband ——"

"Oh," she said, "Hugh and I understood one another."

Wimsey nodded. She was lying, he thought. Farren's objections to Campbell had been notorious. But she was the kind of woman who, if once she set out to radiate sweetness and light, would be obstinate in her mission. He studied the rather full, sulky mouth and narrow, determined forehead. It was the face of a woman who would see only what she wished to see—who would think that one could abolish evils from the world by pretending that they were not there. Such things, for instance, as jealousy or criticism of herself. A dangerous woman, because a stupid woman. Stupid and dangerous, like Desdemona.

"Well, well," he said lightly. "Let's hope the truant will turn up soon. He promised to show me some of his stuff. I'm very keen to have a look at it. I daresay I shall meet him as I buzz about the country. On his bike, as usual, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, he's got his bicycle with him."

"I think there are more bicycles per head of the popula-

tion in Kirkcudbright than in any town I ever struck," said Wimsey.

"That's because we're all so hardworking and poor."

"Just so. Nothing is so virtuous as a bicycle. You can't imagine a bicyclist committing a crime, can you?—except of course, murder or attempted murder."

"Why murder?"

"Well, the way they rush about in gangs on the wrong side of the road and never have any brakes or bells or lights. I call it murder, when they nearly have you into the ditch. Or suicide."

He jumped to his feet with an exclamation of concern. This time Mrs. Farren had really fainted.

CHAPTER VII

GRAHAM

LORD PETER WIMSEY, HAVING RENDERED FIRST AID TO MRS. Farren, left her comfortably reclining on the couch in the sitting-room and went in search of Jeanie. He discovered her in the fishmonger's and dispatched her home with the tidings that her mistress was unwell.

"Ay," said Jeanie, philosophically, "I'm no surprised. She's troubled in her mind aboot Mr. Farren. And nae wonder, wi' him mekkin' a' that disturbance and gaein' aff that gate an' never comin' back for twa nights."

"Two nights?" said Wimsey.

"Ay. Nicht before last it was he went aff on his bicycle, swearin' somethin' awfu' an' nae ward tae say whaur he was gaein' nor what he was gaein' to du."

"Then he wasn't at home last night for dinner?"

"Him? Hame for's denner? 'Deed no, nor ony time o' the day. Monday nicht it was he come back an' fund Campbell i' the hoose an' sent him packin', an' after that there was sic a collie-shangie it nigh frightened my brither's wife into a fit an' her verra near her time, tu. An' oot he gaes and away, wi' Mistress Farren runnin' oot o' the door after him wi' the tears fallin' doon her cheeks. I dinna ken for why she takes on so aboot the man. I'd let him gae an' be daumed tae him, wi' his jealousies an' his tempers."

Wimsey began to see why Jeanie had been sent out on an errand in such a hurry. It was foolish, though, for nobody could expect the girl to hold her tongue over so fine a piece of gossip. Sooner or later, the tale would have come out to

somebody. Even now he observed that curious glances were following them down the street.

He asked a few more questions. No, Jeanie's brother's wife could not say exactly what the quarrel was about, but she had witnessed it from her bedroom window. Mr. Campbell had been in about 6 o'clock, and then Mr. Farren had come in and Mr. Campbell had gone away almost immediately. She could not say there had been any dispute between Farren and Campbell. But then Mr. and Mrs. Farren had talked about an hour in the sitting-room and Mr. Farren had walked about the room and waved his hands a great deal, and Mrs. Farren had cried. Then there had been a shouting and a kind of a skelloch, and Mr. Farren had run out of the door cramming his hat over his eyes, and had snatched up his bicycle. And Mrs. Farren had run out to stop him and he had shaken her roughly off and ridden away. Nor had he been home syne, for Jeanie's brother's wife had kept a look-out for him, being interested to see what might happen.

That was Monday and this was Wednesday; and on the Tuesday, Campbell had been found dead up at the Minnoch.

Wimsey said good-bye to Jeanie, with a caution against talking too much about her employers' affairs, and turned in the direction of the police-station. Then he changed his mind. No need to make trouble before it was wanted. There might be other developments. It would not be a bad idea to run over to Gatehouse. There was a question he wanted to ask Mrs. Green who did the charing for Campbell. Also, something might have been found at Campbell's house—letters, papers or what-not. In any case, a wee run in the car would do him no harm.

Passing over the bridge at Gatehouse, with these intentions, he was arrested by the sight of a tall man standing outside the Anwoth Hotel in conference with the local

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constable. The man, who was very shabbily dressed in an ancient burberry, dilapidated plus-fours, disreputable boots and leggings and a knapsack, waved a hand in violent greeting. Wimsey pulled up with reckless haste, nearly slaying the hotel cat, and waved violently back.

"Hullo—ullo—ullo!" he cried. "Where d'you spring from, you old ruffian?"

"That's just what everybody seems anxious to know," said the untidy man, extending a large, raw-boned hand. "I don't seem to be allowed to go away on a little private matter without a hue and cry. What's it all about?"

Wimsey glanced at the constable, who shook his head mysteriously.

"Having received orders," he began, "to make an inquiry ——"

"But you haven't received orders to make a mystery, have you?" said the untidy man. "What's the matter? Am I supposed to have committed a crime? What is it? Drunk and disorderly, eh? or riding a push-bike without a tail-light? or driving to the public danger, or what?"

"Weel, now, Mr. Graham, sir—in the matter of the bicycle, I wad be glad to know ——"

"Not guilty this time," said Mr. Graham, promptly. "And in any case borrowing isn't stealing, you know."

"Have you been borrowing push-bikes?" asked Wimsey, with interest. "You shouldn't. It's a bad habit. Push-bikes are the curse of this country. Their centre of gravity is too high, for one thing, and their brakes are never in order."

"I know," said Mr. Graham, "it's shameful. Every bicycle I borrow is worse than the last. I often have to speak quite firmly about it. I nearly broke my neck the other day on young Andy's."

"Oh!" said the landlord, who had come up during this

conversation, "it's ye, is't, Mr. Graham, that's got the lad's bicycle? Ye're welcome eneugh tae't, I'm no sayin' the contrary, but the lad's been a bit put out, not knowin' whaur it had disappeared tae."

"It's gone again, has it?" said Mr. Graham. "Well, I tell you it's not me this time. You can tell Andy I'll never borrow his miserable machine again till he has the decency to put it in order. And whoever did take it, God help him, that's all I can say, for he'll probably be found dead in a ditch."

"That may be, Mr. Graham," said the constable, "but I'd be glad if ye wad tell me——"

"Damn it!" said Jock Graham. "No, I will not tell you where I've been. Why should I?"

"Well, it's like this, old dear," said Wimsey. "You may possibly have heard in your mysterious retreat, that Campbell was found dead in a river yesterday afternoon."

"Campbell? Good Lord! No, I hadn't heard. Well, well, well. I hope his sins are forgiven him. What had he done? Taken too many wee halves and walked over the dock at Kirkcudbright?"

"Well, no. Apparently he had been painting and slipped on the stones and bashed his head in."

"Bashed his head in? Not drowned, then?"

"No, not drowned."

"Oh! Well, I always told him he was born to be hanged, but apparently he's got out of it another way. Still, I was right about his not being drowned. Well, poor devil, there's an end of him. I think we'd better go in and have one on the strength of it, don't you? Just a little one to the repose of his soul. He wasn't a man I liked, but I'm sorry in a way to think I'll never pull his leg again. You'll join us, officer?"

"Thank you, sir, but if ye'd kindly——"

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"Leave it to me," murmured Wimsey, jogging the constable's elbow and following Graham into the bar.

"How have you managed not to hear about it, Jock?" he went on, when the drinks had been served. "Where have you been hiding the last two days?"

"That's telling. You're as inquisitive as our friend here. I've been living a retired life—no scandal—no newspapers. But do tell me about Campbell. When did all this happen?"

"They found the body about 2 o'clock," said Wimsey. "He seems to have been seen alive and painting at five past eleven."

"They didn't lose much time about it, then. You know, I've often thought that one might have an accident up in the hills about here and be lost for weeks. Still, it's a fairly well-frequented spot up there at the Minnoch—in the fishing season, at any rate. I don't suppose ——"

"And how did ye ken, might I ask, sir, that the accident took place up at the Minnoch?"

Jock Graham stared at the constable's excited face.

"How did I ——? Oh-ho! To quote an extremely respectable and primly-dressed woman I once happened to overhear conversing with a friend in Theobald's Road, there's bloody more in it than meets the bloody eye. This anxiety about my whereabouts and this bash on Campbell's head—do I understand, constable, that I am suspected of having bashed the good gentleman and tumbled him into the stream like the outlandish knight in the ballad?"

"Well, not exactly, sir, but as a matter of routine ——"

"I see."

"Och, now!" exclaimed the landlord, on whom a light had been slowly breaking. "Ye're not meanin' tae tell as the puir man was murdered?"

"That's as may be," said the constable.

"He does mean it," said Graham. "I read it in his expressive eye. Here's a nice thing to happen in a quiet country spot."

"It's a terrible thing," said the landlord.

"Come now, Jock," said Wimsey. "Put us out of our misery. You can see the suspense is telling on us. How *did* you know Campbell was up at the Minnoch?"

"Telepathy," said Graham, with a wide grin. "I look into your minds and the picture comes before me—the burn full of sharp stones—the steep slope of granite leading down to it—the brig—the trees and the dark pool under them—and I say, 'The Minnoch, by Jove!' Perfectly simple, Watson."

"I didn't know you were a thought-reader."

"It's a suspicious circumstance, isn't it? As a matter of fact, I'm not. I knew Campbell was going to be up at the Minnoch yesterday because he told me so."

"He told you so?"

"Told me so. Yes, why not? I did sometimes speak to Campbell without throwing boots at him, you know. He told me on Monday that he was going up the next day to paint the bridge. Sketched it out for me, grunting all the time—you know his way."

Graham pulled a piece of chalk from his pocket and set to work on the bar counter, his face screwed up into a life-like imitation of Campbell's heavy jowl and puffed lips, and his hand roughing in outlines with Campbell's quick, tricky touch. The picture came up before their eyes with the conjuring quickness of a lightning-sketch at the cinema—the burn, the trees, the bridge and a mass of bulging white cloud, so like the actual canvas Wimsey had seen on the easel that he was thoroughly startled.

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"You ought to be making a living by impersonations, Jock."

"That's my trouble. Too versatile. Paint in everybody's style except my own. Worries the critics. 'Mr. Graham is still fumbling for an individual style'—that kind of thing. But it's fun. Look, here's Gowan."

He rubbed out the sketch and substituted a vivid chalk impression of one of Gowan's characteristic compositions—a grim border-keep, a wide sweep of coast, a boat in the foreground, with muscular fishermen bending over their nets.

"Here's Ferguson—one tree with decorative roots, one reflection of same in water—dim blue distance; in fact, general blues all over—one heap of stones to hold the composition up. Here's Farren—view of the roofs of Kirkcudbright complete with Tolbooth, looking like Noah's Ark built out of nursery bricks—vermilion, Naples yellow, ultramarine—sophisticated *naïveté* and no cast shadows. Waters—'none of these charlatans take the trouble to draw'—bird's-eye view of a stone-quarry with every bump identifiable—horse and cart violently foreshortened at the bottom, to show that he can do it. Bless you"—he slopped some beer on the counter and wiped the mess away with a ragged sleeve—"the whole bunch of them have only got one gift between them that I lack, and that's the single eye, more's the pity. They're perfectly sincere, I'm not—that's what makes the difference. I tell you, Wimsey, half those damned portraits people pay me for are caricatures—only the fools don't know it. If they did, they'd rather die than sign the cheques."

Wimsey laughed. If Graham was playing for time, he was doing it well. If he was trying to avert suspicion from his dangerous gift of imitation, his air of careless frankness could not possibly be better done. And his explanation was

plausible enough—why, indeed, should Campbell not have mentioned where he was going—to Graham or to anyone?

The constable was registering impatience.

“As a matter of routine,” he murmured.

“Oh!” said Mr. Graham. “This lad’s one of the bulldog breed.”

“Obviously,” said Wimsey, “like St. Gengulphus. They cried out, ‘Good gracious! How very tenacious!’ It’s no good, old man. He means to have his answer.”

“Poor fellow!” said Graham. “Want must be his master, as nurses said in the good old days before Montessori was heard of. I was not up at the Minnoch. But where I was is my affair.”

“Weel, sir,” said the constable, nonplussed. Between the Judges’ Rules, the Royal Commission, his natural disinclination to believe anything wrong about Mr. Graham, and his anxiety to pull off a coup, he felt his position to be a difficult one.

“Run along, laddie,” said Graham, kindly. “You’re only wasting your time. You’ve only to look at me to know that I wouldn’t hurt a fly. For all you know, the murderer’s escaping while you and I exchange merry quips over a pint of bitter.”

“I understand,” said the constable, “that ye refuse categoorically tae state whaur ye were on last Monday night.”

“Got it at last!” cried Graham. “We’re slow but sure in this country, Wimsey. That’s right. I refuse categorically, absolutely, *in toto* and entirely. Make a note of it in case you forget it.”

The constable did so with great solemnity.

“Ah, weel,” he said, “I’ll hae tae be reportin’ this tae the authorities.”

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"Right," said Graham. "I'll have a word with them."

The constable shook his head doubtfully and departed with slow reluctance.

"Poor devil!" said Graham. "It's a shame to tease him. Have another, Wimsey?"

Wimsey declined, and Graham took himself off rather abruptly, saying that he must go down and see to things at his studio.

The landlord of the Anwoth followed him with his eyes.

"What's behind that?" said Wimsey, carelessly.

"Och, it will be some tale or anither," replied the landlord. "He's a perfect gentleman, is Graham, and a great lad for the leddies."

"Quite so," said Wimsey. "And that reminds me, Rob, I've got a new limerick for you."

"Have ye noo?" said the landlord, and carefully closed the door between the inn-parlour and the bar.

Having delivered himself of his limerick and taken his leave, Wimsey turned his attention again to business. Mrs. Green, the charwoman, lived in a small cottage at no great distance. She was making bannocks when Wimsey arrived, but having dusted the flour from her hands and transferred the bannocks to the girdle, was willing enough to talk about the sudden death of her gentleman.

Her Scots was broad and her manner excitable, but after putting his questions two or three times, Wimsey succeeded in understanding her replies.

"Did Mr. Campbell take any breakfast before he went out on Monday morning?"

Yes, he did. There had been the remains of some bacon and eggs on the table and a used teapot and cup. Forbye, the loaf and butter had diminished, by comparison with the previous night, and there had been slices cut from the ham.

"Was that Mr. Campbell's usual breakfast?"

Ay, fried eggs and bacon were his breakfast, as regular as clockwork. Two eggs and two rashers, and that was what he had taken that morning, for Mrs. Green had counted.

"Did Mr. Ferguson eat his breakfast that morning also?"

Yes, Mr. Ferguson had taken a kipper with a cup of coffee. Mrs. Green had herself brought in a pair of kippers for him on Saturday, and he had had the one on Sunday morning and the other on Monday morning. There had been nothing unusual about either cottage, that she could see, and so she had told the policeman when he called upon her.

Wimsey turned these matters over in his mind as he ran back to Kirkcudbright. The doctor's report made those two eggs and rashers a suspicious circumstance. Somebody had breakfasted in Campbell's cottage, and the person who could do that most easily was Ferguson. Alternatively, if it was not Ferguson, Ferguson might have seen whoever it was. Tire-some of Ferguson to have gone off to Glasgow like that.

As for Graham, apparently he had not been at Glen Trool. His silence might have half a dozen different explanations. "The leddies" was the most obvious; it would be well, in Graham's own interests, to discover whether he had any local attachment. Or he might merely have discovered some remote river, rich in trout, which he wished to keep to himself. Or he might just be doing it to annoy. One could not tell. Beneath all his surface eccentricity, Graham was a man who kept his wits about him. Still, in a country place, where everybody knows everybody, it is impossible to keep one's movements altogether secret. Somebody would have seen Graham—that is, if somebody chose to speak. But that was as doubtful as everything else about the case, for your country-dweller is a master of pregnant silences.

Wimsey called at Sir Maxwell Jamieson's to make his

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report about the eggs and bacon, which was received with an "Ay, imph'm" of the driest kind. There had been no further news from Dalziel, and he went home, first calling across the way, only to ascertain that Waters had not yet returned.

Bunter received him with respectful welcome, but appeared to have something preying on his mind. On inquiry, however, this turned out to be merely the discovery that the Scotch were so lost to all sense of propriety as to call a dish an "asht"—obviously with the deliberate intention of confusing foreigners and making them feel like bulls in china-shops.

Wimsey sympathised and, to take Bunter's mind off this mortifying experience, mentioned his meeting with Jock Graham.

"Indeed, my lord? I was already apprised of Mr. Graham's reappearance. I understand, my lord, that he was in Creetown on Monday night."

"Was he, by Jove? How do you know?"

Bunter coughed.

"After the interview with the young person at the china-shop, my lord, I stepped for a few moments into the McClellan Arms. Not into the public bar, my lord, but into the bar-parlour adjacent. While there, I accidentally overheard some persons mention the circumstance in the bar."

"What sort of persons?"

"Roughly dressed persons, my lord. I apprehend that they might have been engaged in the fishing-trade."

"Was that all they said?"

"Yes, my lord. One of them unfortunately glanced into the bar-parlour and discovered my presence, and after that they said nothing further about the matter."

"Who were they, do you know?"

"I endeavoured to ascertain from the landlord, but he said no more than that they were a bunch of lads from the harbour."

"Oh! And that's all you ever will hear, I expect. H'm. Did you manage to see any of them?"

"Only the one who looked in at the door, and him only for a brief interval. The rest had their backs to the bar door when I emerged, my lord, and I did not care to appear inquisitive."

"No. Well—Creetown is on the way to Newton-Stewart, but it's a far cry from there to the Minnoch. Did they mention the time at which they saw Mr. Graham?"

"No, my lord, but, from the circumstance that they alluded to the number of drinks he consumed, I apprehend that it would be before closing-time."

"Ah!" said Wimsey. "An inquiry among the Creetown pubs might settle that. Very well, Bunter. I think I shall go out and clear my wits with a round of golf this afternoon. And I'll have a grilled steak and chips at 7.30."

"Very good, my lord."

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Wimsey had his round of golf with the Provost, but without much satisfaction beyond that of beating him five up and three to play. He deduced from this victory that the Provost was not altogether easy in his mind, but he failed altogether to draw him on the subject of Campbell. It was "an unfortunate occurrence," and the Provost thought that "it might be a wee while before they got to the bottom of it"—and after that the conversation was firmly led away to the quouting match at Gatehouse, the recent regatta at Kirkcudbright, the shortage of salmon and depredations of

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poachers in the estuary, and the problems of sewage-distribution in tidal waters.

At half-past nine, when Wimsey had absorbed his grilled steak and a rhubarb-tart, and was dreaming over some old numbers of *The Gallovidian*, he was aroused by a clatter of feet upon the cobblestones of the close. He was just rising to look out of the window, when there was a knock upon the door, and a cheerful female voice called: "May we come in?"

Miss Selby and Miss Cochran occupied adjacent cottages and were continually to be found taking tea in each other's living-rooms or bathing together on the sands at the Doon. Miss Selby was tall, dark, rather angular, rather handsome in an uncompromising kind of way and painted rather good, strong, angular and handsome figure-studies in oils. Miss Cochran was round, cheerful, humorous and grey-haired; she illustrated magazine stories in line and wash. Wimsey liked them both, because they had no nonsense about them, and they liked him for the same reason, and also because they found Bunter extremely amusing. Bunter was always distressed to see them cooking their own dinners and putting up their own curtains. He would step reproachfully to their assistance, and take the hammer and nails from their hands, with a respectful, "Allow me, miss"; and would obligingly offer to look after stews and casseroles during their absence. They rewarded him with gifts of vegetables and flowers from their garden—gifts which Bunter would receive with a respectful, "Thank you, miss. His lordship will be greatly obliged." While Wimsey was greeting his visitors, Bunter now advanced unobtrusively and inquired, as soon as there was a pause in the conversation, whether the ladies would take supper after their journey.

The ladies replied that they were quite well-fed, but a

little investigation showed that they had indeed had nothing since tea-time except a few sandwiches on the train. Wimsey promptly ordered omelettes, a bottle of claret and the remains of the rhubarb-tart to be brought forward, and, when Bunter had withdrawn to prepare the feast, said:

"Well, you've missed all the excitement."

"So they told us at the station," said Miss Cochran.

"What is it all about? Is it true that Mr. Campbell is dead?"

"Quite true. He was found in the river——"

"And now they're saying he's been murdered," put in Miss Selby.

"Oh, they're saying that, are they? Well, that's true, too."

"Good gracious!" said Miss Selby.

"And who is it they're saying has done it?" demanded Miss Cochran.

"They don't know yet," said Wimsey, "but there's a kind of an idea that it was a premeditated job."

"Oh, why?" asked Miss Cochran, bluntly.

"Oh, well, because the symptoms point that way, you know, and there doesn't seem to have been any robbery from the person, or anything—and—in fact, several things."

"And in fact you know more than you think you ought to tell us. Well, it's fortunate we've got an alibi, isn't it, Margaret? We've been in Glasgow ever since yesterday morning. It was on Tuesday it happened, wasn't it?"

"It seems so," said Wimsey, "but just to make sure, they are checking up everybody's whereabouts from Monday night onwards."

"Who's everybody?"

"Well—the people who knew Campbell best, and so on."

"I see. Well, you know we were here on Monday night, because we said good-night to you when you came in, and we went off by the 8.45 yesterday morning and we've got

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any amount of witnesses to show that we were in Glasgow between then and now, so I imagine we're all right. Besides, it would have taken more powerful people than Mary or me to tackle Mr. Campbell. What a relief to know that we can't possibly be suspected!"

"No—you two and Waters are out of the running all right, I fancy."

"Oh? Where was Mr. Waters?"

"Wasn't he with you?"

"With us?"

They stared at one another. Wimsey apologised.

"I'm sorry. Mrs. Doings—his landlady, what's her name?—told me Waters had gone with you two to Glasgow."

"She must have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. He said on Sunday evening at Bob Anderson's that he might possibly turn up, but he didn't, so we thought he'd changed his mind. Anyhow, we didn't really expect him, did we, Mary?"

"No. But isn't he here, then, Lord Peter?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, he's not," said Wimsey, aghast.

"Oh, well, he must be somewhere," said Miss Cochran, comfortably.

"Naturally," said Wimsey, "but he certainly went off at about 8.30 yesterday morning, saying he was going to Glasgow. Or at least, he seems to have left that impression behind him."

"Well, he certainly never came to the station," said Miss Selby, decidedly. "And he wasn't at the show either day, that I could see. But of course he may have had other fish to fry."

Wimsey scratched his head.

"I must interview that woman again," he said. "I must

have misunderstood her. But it's exceedingly odd. Why should he get up and go out early if he wasn't going to Glasgow? Especially ——"

"Especially what?" said Miss Cochran.

"Well, I shouldn't have expected it," said Wimsey. "He was a bit lit-up the night before, and as a rule it takes a lot to get Waters out of bed at the best of times. It's rather unfortunate. Still, we can't do much till he turns up."

"We?" said Miss Selby.

"The police, I mean," said Wimsey, blushing a little.

"You'll be helping the police, I expect," said Miss Cochran. "I was forgetting that you had such a reputation as a Sherlock. I'm sorry we don't seem able to help. You'd better ask Mr. Ferguson. He may have run across Mr. Waters somewhere in Glasgow."

"Oh, Ferguson was there, was he?"

Wimsey put his question carelessly, but not so carelessly as to deceive Miss Cochran, who darted a shrewd glance at him.

"Yes, he was there. I believe we can give ye the precise time we saw him." (As Miss Cochran became more emphatic, she became more Scottish in her accent. She planted her plump feet squarely on the ground and leaned forward with a hand on each knee, like an argumentative workman in a tram.) "That train of ours gets in at 2.16—it's a bad train, stops at every station, and we'd have done better to wait and take the 1.46 at Dumfries, only we wanted to meet Margaret's sister Kathleen and her husband and they were away to England by the 4 o'clock train. They came to the station to meet us, and we went into the hotel and had a bit of lunch, for we hadn't had anything since 8 o'clock—there's none served on that train—and the hotel was as good a place as any to have our bit of talk in. We saw them off at 4

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o'clock, and then we had a wee argument whether we would go straight on to my cousin's where we were staying, or look in at the Gallery first. I said it was too late to do anything, but Margaret said it would be a good idea just to go down and see where they'd hung the different things, and then to come back next day and have our proper look at them; and I agreed that was a sensible notion. So we took the tram and we got into the Exhibition just about half-past four, or a few minutes earlier, and in the first room, whom should we see but Mr. Ferguson, just coming away. So of course we spoke to him and he said he'd been through the rooms pretty thoroughly once and was coming back next day. However, he went round once again with us."

Wimsey, who had been trying to hold the whole local time-table in his head and was hurriedly calculating arrivals and departures, broke in at this point.

"I suppose he really *had* been through the place already?"

"Oh, yes. He told us beforehand where everything was, and mentioned the ones he liked. He'd come in on the same train as we did—only I suppose he would go straight up to the Exhibition."

"On your train—the 2.16. Yes, of course, he would join it at Dumfries. It leaves there at 11.22, doesn't it? Yes, that's right. Did you see him at Dumfries?"

"No, but that doesn't mean he wasn't there. He'd travel smoking, anyway, and we made for a nice, old-fashioned Ladies' Compartment, not being great smokers in confined spaces. Anyhow, he saw us at Glasgow if we didn't see him, because the first thing he said when we met him was, 'I saw you at the station, but you didn't see me. Was that Kathleen and her good man with you?' And then he mentioned that he had been in the same train."

"Pretty good," said Wimsey. "Well, as you say, we'll have to see Ferguson—I mean, the police will have to see him."

Miss Cochran shook her head.

"You can't deceive me," she said. "You're in it up to the eyes. If the truth were told, I dare say you did it yourself."

"No," said Wimsey. "This is about the only murder I couldn't possibly have committed. I haven't the technical skill."

CHAPTER VIII

GOWAN

INSPECTOR MACPHERSON OF KIRKCUDBRIGHT WAS ONE OF those painstaking and unimaginative people for whom no hypothesis is too far-fetched to be investigated. He liked material clues. He paid no attention to such a trivial consideration as psychological improbability. The Chief Constable had put before him the ascertained facts about Campbell's death, and he saw that they pointed to the guilt of some artist or other. He liked them. The medical evidence was what he liked best; good, solid, meaty stuff about rigor and the alimentary canal. The business about trains and timetables pleased him too; it lent itself to being set out in tabular form and verified. The bit about the picture was less satisfactory: it depended on technical matters which he did not personally understand, but he was open-minded enough to accept expert opinion on such matters. He would, for instance, have taken his Cousin Tom's advice on electricity or his sister Alison's opinion about ladies' underwear, and he was not unprepared to admit that a gentleman like Wimsey might know more than he did about artists and their paraphernalia.

Accordingly, he perceived that all artists were, for his purpose, suspect, no matter how rich, respectable or mild-mannered they might be, and whether they were known to have quarrelled with Campbell or not. Kirkcudbright was his district, and his job was to collect alibis and information from every artist in Kirkcudbright, young or old, male or

female, virtuous or wicked, indiscriminately. He went about the thing in a conscientious manner, not omitting Marcus McDonald, who was bedridden, or Mrs. Helen Chambers, who had only just settled in Kirkcudbright, or old John Peterson, who was ninety-two, or Walter Flanagan who had returned from the Great War with an artificial leg. He noted the absence of Waters and Farren, though he did not get as much out of Mrs. Farren as Lord Peter had done; and during the afternoon he presented himself at Mr. Gowan's front-door, notebook in hand and rectitude upon his brow. He had left Gowan to the last, because it was well-known that Mr. Gowan worked in the mornings and resented interruptions before lunch, and Inspector Macpherson had no notion of making difficulties for himself.

The English butler opened the door, and in reply to the Inspector's inquiry, remarked briefly:

"Mr. Gowan is not at home."

The Inspector explained that his business was official, and again requested an interview with Mr. Gowan.

The butler replied loftily:

"Mr. Gowan is h'out."

The Inspector begged to know when Mr. Gowan would be in again.

The butler condescended to explain further.

"Mr. Gowan is away."

To the Scottish mind, this expression has not the same finality that it has to the English mind. The Inspector asked whether Mr. Gowan would be back that evening.

The butler, driven to be explicit, announced imperturbably:

"Mr. Gowan has gone to London."

"Is that so?" said the Inspector, annoyed with himself for having put off his visit so long. "When did he go?"

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The butler appeared to think this catechism ill-bred, but nevertheless replied:

"Mr. Gowan left for London on Monday night."

The Inspector was startled.

"At what time on Monday night?"

The butler appeared to undergo a severe internal struggle, but answered, with great self-control:

"Mr. Gowan took the h'eight forty-five train from Dumfries."

The Inspector thought for a moment. If this was true, it left Gowan out altogether. But it must, of course, be verified.

"I think," he said, "that I had best step in for a moment."

The butler appeared to hesitate, but, seeing that a number of inhabitants from the close opposite had come out to stare at the Inspector and himself, he graciously gave way and let Macpherson in to the handsome panelled entrance-hall.

"I am investigatin'," said the Inspector, "this maitter o' the death o' Mr. Campbell."

The butler bowed his head silently.

"I will tell ye, wi'oot circumlocution, that there is mair than a suspecion that the puir gentleman was murdered."

"So," said the butler, "I h'understand."

"It is important, ye ken," went on Macpherson, "that we should get all possible information from those that saw Mr. Campbell of late."

"Quite so."

"And as a matter of routine, ye understand, that we should ken whaur everybody was at the time the calamity occurred."

"Exactly," said the butler.

"Nae doot," pursued the Inspector, "if Mr. Gowan were at hame, he wad be anxious tae gie us a' the assistance in his power."

The butler was sure that Mr. Gowan would be only too happy to do so.

The Inspector opened his notebook.

"Your name is Halcock, is't no?" he began.

The butler corrected him.

"H'alcock," he said, reprovingly.

"H, a, double-l?" suggested the Inspector.

"There is no h'aitch in the name, young man. H'ay is the first letter, and there is h'only one h'ell."

"I beg your pardon," said the Inspector.

"Granted," said Mr. Alcock.

"Weel, noo, Mr. Alcock, juist a pure formality, ye understand, whit time did Mr. Gowan leave Kirkcudbright on Monday nicht?"

"It would be shortly after h'eight."

"Whae drove him?"

"Hammond, the chauffeur."

"Ammond?" said the Inspector.

"Hammond," said the butler, with dignity. "H'albert Hammond is his name—with a h'aitch."

"I beg your pardon," said the Inspector.

"Granted," said Mr. Alcock. "Perhaps you would wish to speak to Hammond?"

"Presently," said the Inspector. "Can ye tell me whether Mr. Gowan had seen Mr. Campbell at a' on the Monday?"

"I could not undertake to say."

"Mr. Gowan was friendly with Mr. Campbell?"

"I could not undertake to say."

"Has Mr. Campbell visited at the house recently?"

"Mr. Campbell has never visited at this house to my knowledge."

"Indeed? Imph'm." The Inspector knew as well as Mr. Alcock that Gowan held himself very much aloof from the

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rest of the artistic population, and seldom invited anybody except for a stately bridge-party now and again, but he felt it his duty to put these questions officially. He ploughed on conscientiously.

"Noo, I'm only juist checkin' up on this maitter, ye ken, wi' a' Mr. Campbell's acquaintances. Can ye tell me what Mr. Gowan did on the Monday?"

"Mr. Gowan rose at 9 o'clock according to custom and breakfasted at 9.30. He then took a turn in the garden and retired to his studio in the customary manner. He partook of luncheon at the usual time, 1.30. H'after luncheon, he was again engaged on his h'artistic pursuits till 4 o'clock, when tea was served in the library."

The butler paused.

"Ay?" said the Inspector, encouragingly.

"H'after tea," went on the butler, more slowly, "he went out for a run in the two-seater."

"Did Hammond drive him?"

"No. When Mr. Gowan takes the two-seater, he is accustomed to drive himself."

"Ah? Ay. Whaur did he go?"

"I could not undertake to say."

"Weel, when did he return?"

"At about 7 o'clock."

"And then?"

"Mr. Gowan then made the h'observation that he had decided to go to town that night."

"Had he said anything about that airlier?"

"No. Mr. Gowan is in the habit of making occasional journeys to town."

"Without previous notice?"

The butler bowed.

"It didna strike ye as unusual in any way?"

"Certainly not."

"Ay, imph'm. Did he dine before leaving?"

"No. I understood Mr. Gowan to say that he would be dining on the train."

"On the train? Ye say he took the 8.45 from Dumfries?"

"So I was given to understand."

"But, man, are ye no aware that the 8.45 disna mak' ony connection wi' London? It arrives in Carlisle at 9.59, which is verra late tae get dinner, and after that there's nae train tae London till five meenuts past twelve. Wherefore did he no tak' his dinner here an' catch the 11.8 at Dumfries?"

"I could not undertake to say. Mr. Gowan did not h'inform me. Possibly Mr. Gowan had some business to transact at Carlisle."

The Inspector gazed at Mr. Alcock's large, white, imperturbable face, and said:

"Ay, that may be. Did Mr. Gowan say how long he would be away?"

"Mr. Gowan mentioned that he might be h'absent for a week or ten days."

"Did he give you any address?"

"He desired that letters should be forwarded to his club."

"And that is?"

"The Mahlstick, in Piccadilly."

The Inspector made a note of the address, and added:

"Have ye heard from Mr. Gowan since his departure?"

The butler raised his eyebrows.

"No." He paused, and then went on less frigidly. "Mr. Gowan would not write unless he had occasion to mention any special h'instructions."

"Ay, that's so. Then so far as ye ken, Mr. Gowan is at this moment in London."

"For all I know to the contrary, he is."

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"Imph'm. Weel, noo—I wad like tae speak a word wi' Hammond."

"Very good." Mr. Alcock rang the bell, which was answered by a young and rather pretty maid.

"Betty," said Mr. Alcock, "h'inform Hammond that his presence is required by the H'Inspector."

"Juist a moment," said Macpherson. "Betty, ma lass, whit time did Mr. Gowan leave here o' Monday nicht?"

"About 8 o'clock, sir," said the girl, quickly, with a little glance at the butler.

"Did he dine before he went?"

"I—I cannot juist charge ma memory, sir."

"Come, my girl," said Mr. Alcock, magisterially, "surely you can remember that. There's nothing to be frightened about."

"N-n-no, Mr. Alcock."

"No," said Mr. Alcock. "You are quite sure about that. Mr. Gowan did not dine at home on Monday?"

"No."

Mr. Alcock nodded.

"Then run and give Hammond my message—unless the Inspector wants to ask you anything further?"

"No," said Macpherson.

"Has—onething happened?" asked Betty, tremulously.

"Nothing whatever, nothing whatever," replied the butler. "The Inspector is just making some routine inquiries, as I understand. And, Betty, just you give that message to Hammond and come straight back. No stopping and chattering. The Inspector has his work to get through, same as you and me."

"Yes—I mean, no, Mr. Alcock."

"A good girl," said the butler, as Betty ran out, "but slow in the uptake, if you understand me."

"Imph'm," said Inspector Macpherson.

Hammond, the chauffeur, was a small, perky man, mongrel in speech, but betraying a strong streak of the fundamental cockney. The Inspector reeled off his preliminary speech about routine inquiries, and then came to the point.

"Did ye drive Mr. Gowan onywhere on Monday last?"

"That's right. Drove 'im ter Dumfries."

"What time?"

"Eight o'clock for the 8.45."

"In the two-seater?"

"Naow, in the saloon."

"What time did Mr. Gowan come in wi' the two-seater?"

"'Baht a quarter past seven, might be earlier, might be later. I was 'avin' me supper at 'alf-past seven, and the Riley was in the garridge w'en I come back there."

"Did Mr. Gowan tak' ony luggage wi' him?"

"Bit of a bag, like. One 'er they 'tashy cases—'baht so long."

He indicated a spread of about two feet.

"Ay, imph'm. Did ye see him get into the train?"

"Naow. 'E walked into the station and told me ter cut along 'ome."

"What time was that?"

"Eight thirty-five as near as makes no difference."

"And ye cam' straight back tae Kirkcudbright?"

"Sure thing. Naow. Wait a mo. I brought a parcel o' stuff back with me."

"Ay? An' whit stuff wad that be?"

"Two pictures of Mr. Gowan's, what belonged to a gentleman in Dumfries. The boss didn't want 'em sent by train, so I picked 'em up at the house. They was all done up waitin' to be collected."

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"Ye went tae this hoose after ye had left Mr. Gowan at the station?"

"That's right. Gentleman name of Phillips. Want 'is address?"

"Ay—ye may as weel gie't me."

The chauffeur gave it.

"Did Mr. Gowan mek ony mention o' whaur he was gaein'?"

"'E only said 'e wanted ter catch the train for Carlisle."

"Carlisle?"

"That's right."

"He didna say for London?"

"Not ter me. Train for Carlisle, 'e says."

"Ay—and when did he first gi' ye the order?"

"Mr. Alcock comes down w'en I was 'avin' me supper, and says Mr. Gowan wanted the saloon round at 8 o'clock ter tike 'im ter Dumfries. And I says, 'Right-oh!' I says, 'an' I can pick up them there pitchers at the same time.' That's what I says and that's what I done."

"Ay, verra guid. That's quite clear. Thank you, Mr. Hammond. This is naething at a', ye understand, but juist a simple formality."

"Thet's all right. Finni?"

"What's that?"

"I says, finni? meaning, is that O. K.? complet? 'ave yer done?"

"Oo, ay, there's nae mair I'll be wantin' from ye at the moment."

"Well, cheerio, then," said the chauffeur.

"Did you wish to see Mrs. Alcock?" inquired the butler, politely, but with the air of one prepared to endure all things.

"Och, no—I'm thinkin' it'll no be necessary. Thank ye verra much, Mr. Alcock."

"Don't mention it," said the butler. "I trust that you will soon have the miscreant by the heels. Very happy to have been of use, I am sure. There are two steps h'up to the front door. A beautiful h'evening, is it not? Reelly, the sky is quite a poem. Good h'evening, Inspector."

"A' the same," said the Inspector to himself, "it'll no be amiss tae make inquiries at Dumfries. They'll no have forgotten Gowan, wi' his big black beard. It's a queer thing he should suddenly be wantin' tae spend twa-three hours in Carlisle waitin' for a train tae London. He micht verra weel ha' hired anither car tae fetch him hame."

He considered a little, as he wandered thoughtfully towards the police-station.

"Forbye," he continued, "yon lassie didna seem juist sae ready wi' her replies as they twa."

He pushed back his cap and scratched his head.

"Nae maitter," said he, cheerfully, "I'll sort it yet."

CHAPTER IX

MRS. McLEOD

THINGS WERE LIVELY IN THE CLOSE THAT NIGHT. WIMSEY had escorted his visitors to their doors, and was thinking of turning in, when the sudden opening of the blue gate and the cries of a fellow-creature entangled and in pain urged him to go to the assistance of the Chief Constable, who had become involved with the bicycles in the narrow passage.

"I don't mind telling you," said Sir Maxwell, when at length he was safely seated in Wimsey's armchair and comforted with Scotch, "that I am greatly disturbed about all this business. If I could see any clear line to follow up, it would be more satisfactory. Even supposing that your list of suspects comprises the whole of the possibilities (which at present, mark you, I am not disposed to grant)—even then, I simply do not know where to start an inquiry. That one or two of them should have no good alibis is only what one might expect—but that practically all of them should be open to suspicion really bewilders me."

"Dear me!" said Wimsey.

"Graham and Strachan," went on the Chief Constable, "were both out all night, as you know, and have no explanations. Ferguson appears, from what you say, to be all right, but he has not been interrogated yet, and really, after to-day's experiences, I am beginning to doubt whether anybody's movements will bear investigation. Farren's disappearance is so suspicious that, if it were not for the extraordinary behaviour of the rest, I should get out a warrant for him straight away. Gowan ——"

"Surely not Gowan, too?"

"Gowan has gone to England, and there are points in Inspector Macpherson's report ——"

"I haven't heard that yet."

"No." The Chief Constable gave the gist of the Inspector's interview with the servants, and resumed:

"There are undoubtedly points there that need looking into. And now comes a most infernal business about Waters."

"Unbosom yourself," said Wimsey. "Trouble shared is trouble halved."

"Well," said Sir Maxwell, "when Waters didn't turn up to-day with the ladies yonder. Inspector Macpherson made a few further inquiries of Mrs. McLeod, who seems to have misled you—though, I think and hope, unintentionally. And these inquiries brought to light a very remarkable circumstance.

"Apparently Waters did ask to be called early on the Tuesday morning and did make the remark that he rather thought of going to Glasgow. On the Monday night, Mrs. McLeod heard him come in with you and go up to bed. Then you went out again. She puts this at about 10.30. Is that right?"

"Meaning, did I leave about 10.30? Yes, that's near enough."

"Well, then, some time between 11 and midnight, Mrs. McLeod heard somebody throwing pebbles at Waters' bedroom window. Her room is next but one to his, and they both look out on the High Street. She looked out, and saw a man down below. She couldn't make him out very well, but he seemed to be shortish and broad, well wrapped up in an overcoat and muffler. She was just going to shout down

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and tell him to shut up, when Waters' window opened, and she heard Waters say angrily:

" 'What the devil do you want? '

"The man in the street said something which she did not catch, and then Waters said:

" 'Well, don't make that blasted row. I'm coming down.' "

"She then leaned out a little further and saw a four-seater car standing a few yards down the street. Waters came down presently in some sort of outdoor togs—a sweater and trousers, she thinks—and he and the man went into Waters' sitting-room. They talked there for a bit, and Mrs. McLeod went back to bed. Presently she heard somebody run up to Waters' bedroom and down again, and the front door was opened and shut. Mrs. McLeod looked out once more, and saw both men climb into the car and move off. In about three-quarters of an hour—being thoroughly wakened up by that time—she heard the door open softly again, and footsteps tiptoeing up the stairs into Waters' bedroom.

"Nothing more happened after that, and at 7.30 she knocked on Waters' door as arranged, with his shaving-water, and at 8 o'clock she put his breakfast in the sitting-room. She then went out to the back of the house to do some household work, and at 8.20, when she came in again, Waters had eaten a sketchy sort of breakfast and gone.

"Now, there are two more interesting points. First of all, Waters went—ostensibly to see an exhibition in Glasgow—in an old sweater, a pair of grey flannel bags, tennis-shoes and an old burberry. And secondly, he took his bicycle with him."

"What?" cried Wimsey.

"He took his bicycle with him. Or rather, to be accurate, his bicycle, which stands just inside the front door, was there

on the Monday night and was gone at 8.20. The presumption is that Waters took it."

"Good Lord!"

"What do you make of that?" demanded the Chief Constable.

"What you want me to make of it," said Wimsey, slowly, "is that the man in the street was Campbell, come back to finish out his row with Waters. That they went off together to fight it out. That in the row, Campbell got his head bashed in. That Waters then concealed the body somewhere. That he came home, in order to look as ordinary as possible. That he then thought out a plan of concealment, and that next morning he went off at the time previously appointed, put the body and the bicycle in Campbell's car, and hared off to the Minnoch to fake the accident."

"Can you make anything else of it?"

"I *might* make fifty things," said Wimsey, "but—not to practise any mean concealment, I will admit that the circumstances seem to fit the crime. Except, perhaps, for one point."

"Yes, I thought of that. What did he do with the body between midnight and 8 a.m.?"

"No," said Wimsey. "No—I see no difficulty about that. All he had to do was to put the body in the car and run it along to his studio. There is plenty of open space there where people often stand cars and carts, and nobody would take any notice of an old car with junk in it, covered with a rug. It's not as if he'd left it in Piccadilly Circus. People leave cars in the street all night in this place, and nobody bothers. No, that's not what's puzzling me."

"Well?"

"Well! if all that is true, where is Waters? He ought to have been here yesterday, blatantly establishing his entire

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innocence. What's the good of concocting an elaborate fake like that, and then drawing suspicion on yourself by running away?"

"Perhaps he got cold feet when he'd done it. Anyhow, your objection applies to them all, except Strachan and possibly Ferguson."

"That's true. Well, Chief, I think you'll have to send out the hue and cry after Waters."

"I suppose I shall. Will this mean Scotland Yard, do you suppose?"

"Well, you'll have to get help in tracing these people all over the country. They may be anywhere. But I'm still inclined to think that it's a case where local knowledge can make the running best. But I'm not in a position to pronounce, don't you know."

"Of course, I'd rather we could work it ourselves. Macpherson is a good man and so is Dalziel."

"That reminds me," said Wimsey, "how about the young man they detained at Stranraer?"

Sir Maxwell groaned.

"A wash-out. He turns out to be a perfectly respectable stranger employed in a linen manufactory at Larne. Apparently he had leave to visit his family, who live in some obscure farm near Pinwherry. He was given a long week-end, finishing up on Monday night. It seems there was some kind of a jollification on the Monday night, and the lad was over-persuaded to stay on for it. On Tuesday, as soon as he had recovered his senses, he bolted off to the station, thinking he could get back that afternoon, but mistook the time-table and then found he could get no boat before 7 o'clock that evening."

"Having, of course, missed the morning boat."

"Exactly. That was what he originally intended to catch,

of course, but owing to the jollification, he didn't. Well, having got to Stranraer, he decided that there was no point in returning that night, and that he might as well stay over and take the 6.10 boat on Wednesday morning. Consequently, Dalziel's message to the Stranraer police caught him as he was boarding this morning's boat. Dalziel has been working like a nigger all day, getting him identified by his family and by the station-master at Pinwherry and by the people at Larne, and the upshot of it is that his story is perfectly straight, and that he's guilty of nothing worse than being too drunk to go back to work on Monday night. Confound the fellow! He's wasted a whole day of our best man's time, and left us exactly where we were before. I hope he's sacked, that's all."

"Oh, don't be vindictive," said Wimsey. "He couldn't know how inconvenient he was going to be. He 'maun ha' gotten a rare fricht,' as the man in Ian Hay's book said about the lice in his blanket."

The Chief Constable grunted.

"Any more news of the man with the bicycle who took the train at Girvan?"

"No, except that they've checked the tickets and decided that he went to Ayr all right."

"How about the bicycle?"

"The bicycle-ticket appears to have been given up too, though we can't trace any ticket-collector who remembers anything about it. It would be much easier if we knew what kind of bicycle we were looking for."

"M'm. Yes. It wouldn't be a bad idea to get hold of some exact descriptions. Mrs. McLeod ought to know what Waters' bike looked like. I bet Andy could tell you every scratch and scrape on his old crock. It's got new tyres on, by the way. That ought to be a help."

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"And then there's Farren's bicycle."

"So there is. And there's a very fine selection of bicycles, male and female, up our close. Anybody who urgently wanted to borrow one in Gatehouse or Kirkcudbright wouldn't have very great difficulty. And they all look much alike—honest, hard-working bicycles, half as old as time. For all we know, the murderer's bicycle, if he was a murderer, and used one, may have come peacefully back home by this time."

"That's a fact," said the Chief Constable. "But we'll circulate those descriptions all the same."

CHAPTER X

SERGEANT DALZIEL

ON THE THURSDAY MORNING, SERGEANT DALZIEL WOKE unrefreshed and irritable. He had rather counted upon the young man at Stranraer. To have a murder reported at lunch-time on Tuesday, and to catch the murderer at 6.30 the next morning would, he felt, have been a smart piece of work. Now he had to start all over again. The voluminous, contradictory and confusing reports from Kirkcudbright worried him. Also he felt dissatisfied about the bicyclist at Girvan. Surely it must be possible to trace him and his bicycle. These inquiries by telephone were never satisfactory. There was nothing for it, he supposed, but to go himself. With a grunt of annoyance, he tucked himself into his shabby car, collected Police Constable Ross to act as his aide-de-camp, and set out to collect descriptions.

He began with the Anwoth Hotel. Here he had the advantage of interviewing the outraged owner of the missing bicycle. Information was forthcoming in abundance. He had to look for a six-year-old Raleigh, with two new Dunlop tyres. The frame was painted black; one of the handle-bar grips was slightly broken; the bell was missing and the brakes defective. There was a tool-bag containing a repair outfit; a pump on the cross-bar, and a carrier at the back. The Sergeant wrote down all the particulars, promised his best attention and passed on his way.

At Waters' lodgings, his task was more difficult. Mrs. McLeod had seen the bicycle week after week standing in

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her front passage, but, like most people of her type and sex, had only the very vaguest idea of its appearance. It was "an auld yin," it was of "the ordinar' colour," she "couldna charge her memory" as to its fittings, though she thought there was, or had been, a lamp on it, because she had once had occasion to complain of drips on her floor. As for the maker's name, it had not occurred to her to look for it.

Her small son, however, proved more observant. He declared that it was a very old Humber, very rusty, and that it had neither bell nor lamp nor pump. "But there's Mr. Waters' name on a wee luggage label," he added, pleased to supply so helpful a clue.

"Ay, but I doot it'll no be there the noo," said the Sergeant.

He passed on to Mrs. Farren's. Here he at first drew a complete blank. Mrs. Farren "had not the faintest idea" what was the make of her husband's bicycle. She apologised for being so unpractical, and gave the Sergeant the impression that such details were beneath an artist's notice.

"I'm sure," she added, "I couldn't even tell you what make my own is."

"H'm," said the Sergeant, struck by an idea, "could ye let me have a look at your own bicycle, ma'am?"

"Oh, certainly." She led the way to an outhouse, and indicated a clean, well-kept Sunbeam, not new, but well-oiled, and with all its parts in good condition.

"Ye keep it verra nice," said Dalziel, approvingly.

"I like to have everything orderly and clean," said Mrs. Farren. "There is a real beauty in cleanliness and decency. Even inanimate things may breathe out a kind of loveliness if they are well cared-for. Do not you think so?"

"Nae doot, Mistress Farren, nae doot, ma'am. Wad this

machine and your husband's have been bought at the same time? "

" Oh, no—his is newer than this."

" Ah! " said Dalziel, disappointed. " Imph'm. Aweel, nae doot Mr. Farren'll be returnin' home before verra long. Ye ha' heard naething from him, I suppose? "

" No. But that's not really surprising. He does go off like this sometimes, for days together. You know what men are—especially artists and fishers."

" Och, ay," said Dalziel, comfortably. " Weel, if we should meet wi' him onywhere, we'll tell him he's expectit hame. Could I speak a bit word wi' the lassie? She'll maybe ken what kind o' bicycle it is."

" Jeanie? Oh, certainly—though I doubt if she'll know much about it. I am always telling her she should be more observant—though I'm afraid I'm a bad example to follow. By the way, Sergeant, do you mind telling me why ——"

She stopped and laid her hand on her throat as if the words were difficult to say, or as though, while feeling bound to ask the question, she were reluctant to hear the answer.

" Why, what were ye aboot tae say? "

" Why all this fuss about my husband's bicycle? "

The Sergeant looked hard at her for a moment, then turned his eyes away and answered pleasantly:

" Och, 'tis naething. But there's several bicycles missin' lately, and we've found a dealer at Castle-Douglas wi' twa-three machines he disna seem able tae gie a verra gude account on. Sae we're juist mekkin' a sort o' round-up throughout the district, tae see if we can identify ony o' them. However, ye're quite sure Mr. Farren has his bicycle wi' him? "

" So far as I know. Why not? He—went away on it.

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But—I don't know of course—he may have left it somewhere—how should I know? He might have had it stolen since Monday, anywhere, by anybody. I—have you found it anywhere?"

Under Dalziel's steadfast eye, she was fumbling and stammering.

"I'll tak' ma aith," said Dalziel to himself, "she kens fine there is some importance tae be attached tae the bicycle, and she disna ken whether tae say her man had it or no. Whae could ha' tell't her? It's no that Lord Peter, for he's clever, wi' a' his bletherin' talk. And it's no Macpherson, he'd never let oot a word. There's some yin is expectin' yon bicycle tae be found in a queer place, I reckon."

Jeanie proved, indeed, to know as little about the bicycle as was to be expected, and produced no information beyond the fact that Mr. Farren was accustomed to clean both machines himself, and took "a wheen o' trouble" over them. A man who cared for his tools, evidently, and particular in certain matters, though he was an artist.

A bicycle-shop in the town was more helpful. The machine was a Raleigh, not new, but in very good condition, black, with plated handle-bars. The shop had fitted a new Dunlop tyre to the back wheel a few weeks previously; the front tyre was of the same make and about six months old. Bell, brakes, lamps and brackets were all in good order.

Armed with these particulars, the Sergeant made his way to Girvan Station. Here he found the porter concerned, a middle-aged man named McSkimming, who repeated to him, in rather more detail, the account he had already given to the station-master.

The train from Stranraer was due in at 1.6, and on the Tuesday it had come in well up to time. It had just entered the station, when a gentleman had come in hurriedly, wheel-

ing a bicycle. He had called to McSkimming, and the man had noticed the high, affected English voice, with its "Heah, portah!" The gentleman had told him to label the bicycle for Ayr, quick, and the porter had wheeled the machine along to the little case containing luggage-labels. While he was labelling it, the gentleman was undoing a strap which held a small leather case to the carrier, saying that he would take it in the carriage with him. As time was short, he had pulled out a note-case from his pocket and sent McSkimming off to buy him a third-class ticket and bicycle-ticket for Ayr. Running back with these, the man had seen his passenger standing at the door of a third-class Smoker. He had handed over the tickets and received his tip, and had then placed the bicycle in the rear van. The train had moved out almost immediately afterwards.

No, he had not noticed the gentleman's face particularly. He was wearing a grey flannel suit and a check cap, and he had passed his handkerchief over his face from time to time, as though he were very hot with bicycling in the sun. As he gave the tip he had said something about being glad he had caught the train, and that it was a stiff pull from Ballantrae. He wore slightly tinted spectacles—the sort that is used to shield the eyes from sun-glare. He might have been clean-shaven, or he might have had a small moustache. McSkimming had had no time to notice details, forbye he had been feeling very unwell at the time with an awful pain to his stomach. If anything, he was feeling still worse to-day, and dooted that handling heavy luggage on a hot day did a man no good.

Dalziel sympathised and asked whether he thought he would be able to identify the man or the bicycle if he saw them again.

The porter did not know—he thought not. The bicycle

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had been old and dusty. He had not noticed the make. It was not his business. His business was to label it for Ayr, and he had so labelled it and put it in the van, and there was an end of it.

So far, so good. The bicycle had had a carrier, but then, many bicycles had that. It had looked old, and therefore was not very likely to have been Farren's, but it might have been either of the other two. There seemed to be no doubt that passenger and bicycle, whoever and whatever they might be, had travelled safely by the 1.11 to Ayr.

Dalziel thanked and rewarded the porter and returned to his car. Consulting the time-table, he saw that the train stopped only once before Ayr, and that was at Maybole. It would be worth while to call and see if, by any chance, the passenger had left the train there, instead of going on to Ayr.

At Maybole he interviewed the station-master, and learned that only two passengers had alighted from the Stranraer train on the Tuesday. Both were women, and neither had a bicycle. This was only what he might have expected. The station-master added that the tickets of all passengers for Ayr by the train in question would be collected at Maybole. Eight third-class tickets had been given up—as was proved by a reference to the booking-clerk's returns—including a third-class ticket from Girvan. Any discrepancy between the number of tickets issued and collected would be checked at the Audit Office at Glasgow and reported within three days, so that if there was anything wrong about these tickets, they might expect to hear about it by the next day. The bicycle-ticket of a passenger travelling to Ayr would not be collected at Maybole; it would be retained by him until he claimed the machine at Ayr.

Dalziel left instructions that any query arising about

tickets should be at once reported to him, and the two policemen then made their way to Ayr.

Ayr is a good-sized station, acting as a junction for several lines of traffic. The main line from Stranraer to Glasgow runs straight through the station. On the east side of the main line is the principal platform, containing the booking-hall, bookstall and station entrance, with a number of bays for branch lines.

Here Dalziel directed his first inquiries to the question of the bicycle ticket. A reference to the records showed that a ticket issued from Girvan to cover a twenty-five mile journey had been duly given up at Ayr. The next question was, to whom had the ticket been handed? Since the passenger-tickets had all been collected at Maybole, there would have been no collector at the barrier on that particular occasion. Therefore, presumably, the ticket would have been given up to the porter who removed the bicycle from the van.

Dalziel and Ross interviewed the porters in turn, but all were quite positive that they had not taken any bicycle out of the Stranraer train on the Tuesday. One of them, however, recollected something about the ticket. After seeing a number of passengers out of the train, he had gone back to the rear brake to deal with the luggage. The guard had then handed him a bicycle ticket, saying that it belonged to a gentleman who had taken his bicycle out himself and wheeled it away. The porter had considered this a shabby trick to avoid giving a tip, but he supposed that the traveller had been in a hurry, since the guard had seen him briskly wheeling the machine away in the direction of the exit. By that time the passenger would, of course, have left the station. People were often mean about tips, bicyclists especially. With times so hard and money so tight you didn't get twopence nowadays where once you would have got six-

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pence or a shilling. Call this a Socialist Government. Things were harder than ever for a working man, and as for Jimmy Thomas, he had sold himself, lock, stock and barrel, to the capitalists. If he (the porter) had had the right treatment, he would have been something better than an ordinary porter long before this, but with everybody getting at you all at once —

Dalziel cut short this jeremiad by asking whether the same guard would be travelling on the train that afternoon. The porter said, Yes, he would, and Dalziel determined to wait and interview him when he arrived. In the meantime he thought he and Ross might as well get some lunch, after which they would have to find somebody who had seen the bicyclist leave the station.

Over a hasty meal in the refreshment-room, the two officers discussed their campaign. It might take some time to trace the movements of their quarry after leaving Ayr Station, and it was necessary that Dalziel should be back at Newton-Stewart as early as possible, to keep in touch with Macpherson. There were a number of routine inquiries to be made at Glasgow, and it would, he felt, be advisable to get hold of photographs of all the persons at present under suspicion, in order that the bicyclist might be identified, if possible. Since all the men were well-known artists, it seemed likely that an inquiry among the leading Glasgow news-agencies would produce the photographs, and this would be a far better plan than asking for them directly at Gatehouse and Kirkcudbright, which would have the effect of putting the suspects on their guard. It was therefore decided that Dalziel should board the train from Stranraer when it came in, and proceed to Glasgow, interviewing the guard on the way. Ross should keep the car and pursue his investigations as and how he could, reporting to Newton-Stewart

from time to time. If he got on the bicyclist's track, he was to follow where it led and, if necessary, detain the man when he found him.

At 1.48, the train came in, and Dalziel got into it, after ascertaining that the guard was, in fact, the same man who had been in charge on the Tuesday. As it drew away from Ayr, he observed Ross engaged in conversation with the bookstall clerk. Ross was an energetic and enthusiastic man, and the Sergeant felt sure that he would not be slack in his investigations. He rather wished that he had felt justified in himself taking over the more adventurous and entertaining side of the inquiry, but he reflected that there was, after all, no certainty that the elusive bicyclist had anything to do with the crime, and that it would not do for him, in his position, to lose himself indefinitely on what might prove to be a wild-goose chase. He made his way along the train to the guard's van.

The guard perfectly remembered the incident of the bicycle. The train had scarcely drawn up at the station before a passenger—a youngish man in a check cap and grey flannel suit and wearing Crookes' glasses—had come running along the platform to the van. He had addressed the guard, saying that he wanted his bicycle got out immediately, as he had no time to lose. The porters were all up in front, and the guard had himself opened the van and handed out the bicycle, first glancing at the label to make sure that it was the right one. It was labelled to Ayr correctly enough, and he remembered its being put in at Girvan. The gentleman thrust the ticket into his hand, together with a shilling tip, and immediately walked away with the bicycle in the direction of the exit. The guard further recollected that the passenger had been carrying a small attaché-case. He had not seen him actually leave the station, because he had had

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to see to the coupling of the Pullman Restaurant Car, which was put on at Ayr. Before leaving the station, he had handed the bicycle-ticket over to a porter to be sent to headquarters in the usual way.

Dalziel asked next for a personal description of the traveller. This was not so easy to get. The guard had only seen him for about half a minute. He thought he would be between thirty and forty, of middle height, and either clean-shaven or wearing a small, fair moustache. Not a dark moustache—the guard felt sure he would have noticed that. His hair was almost invisible beneath his cap, but the guard's general impression was of a fairish man with a fresh complexion. He might perhaps have been mouse-coloured or sandy. His eyes, beneath the glasses, were at any rate not noticeably dark—blue, grey or hazel, possibly. The guard, like the porter at Girvan, had particularly noticed the high, affected English voice. He thought he might recognise a photograph of the man if he saw it, but he really could not be sure. Everything about the man, with the exception of the voice and the glasses, might be called nondescript. The bicycle was an old and shabby one. The guard had not observed the make, but he had noticed that the tyres were comparatively new.

Dalziel nodded. He knew better than to expect a recognisable description of a man in a cap and glasses, seen only for a few seconds by a busy official at a railway-station. He went back to his compartment and passed the time making notes of the case until the train, after only a brief halt at Paisley, Gilmour Street, drew in to St. Enoch Station.

Here there was nothing for him to do except to inquire whether all tickets collected on the Tuesday had already been forwarded to the Audit Office. Being assured that this

was so, he betook himself thither and was soon closeted with the head official there.

His business here was the purely routine matter of checking the tickets issued and collected on the Tuesday between Gatehouse and St. Enoch and Kirkcudbright and St. Enoch respectively. He found that these had already been made up and found to agree perfectly with the returns sent in by the issuing clerks. Wimsey's vague suggestion that Waters might have started from Kirkcudbright with a Glasgow ticket and disappeared *en route* was evidently incorrect. If, unseen by either the officials or by Miss Selby and Miss Cochran, he had indeed taken the 8.45 from Kirkcudbright, he must have booked to some intermediate station. But there seemed no reason at all to suppose that he had ever started by that train at all. Waters had simply disappeared and taken his bicycle with him. Was this, or was it not, the bicycle which had travelled to Ayr? The Sergeant, remembering that young Andrew had fitted new tyres not long before, was more inclined to think that this might be the Anwoth Hotel bicycle, but then he had no evidence about the condition of Waters' tyres.

He inquired for Ferguson's ticket, which was readily identified, being the only first-class ticket issued from Gatehouse to Glasgow that day. It had been duly punched at Maxwelltown, between Gatehouse and Dumfries, and again at Hurlford and Mauchline, between Dumfries and St. Enoch, thus affording definite proof that Ferguson had made the whole journey as he had purported to do.

Not satisfied with this, Dalziel demanded a check of all tickets issued on Tuesday on all lines within a fifty-mile radius of Newton-Stewart, in case some interesting discrepancy of some sort should turn up somewhere, and then departed for the Central Police Station at Glasgow.

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Here he set on foot inquiries for a bicyclist seen travelling over the road between Bargrennan and Girvan between 11 a.m. and 1.11 p. m. on Tuesday morning, as also for any bicyclist seen in the neighbourhood of Ayr on the Tuesday afternoon, or travelling on any line out of Ayr or any of the neighbouring stations on Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday. For it readily occurred to him that the bicyclist might have ridden from Ayr to some near-by station and re-booked there, after, perhaps, disguising his appearance in some way. He then remembered that the compromising bicycle might have been abandoned in some convenient spot, and sent out a further call to search station-cloakrooms for unclaimed bicycles and report any bicycle left derelict by the roadside round about Ayr and the neighbourhood. He gave a general description of the three missing bicycles, asking, however, that reports should not be confined to these two makes, but extended to include any bicycle found abandoned during the prescribed period.

Having put the machinery of the law in motion, he turned his attention to the matter of the photographs. He had little difficulty in collecting what he needed among the newspaper offices of the city, and finished up at 6 o'clock with a fine collection of portraits of all six artists. He then discovered that he had missed the last train to Newton-Stewart, and that his only hope of getting back that night was to go to Girvan or Lockerbie and drive home.

His own car was, of course, at Ayr. Wearily, the Sergeant went to the 'phone and rang up the Ayr police to discover if Constable Ross was still in the town. But luck was against him. Ross had been in and left a message that he was following up a clue in the direction of Kilmarnock and would report again.

Cursing his fate—though somewhat cheered by the

thought of a clue—Dalziel then rang up Kirkcudbright. Inspector Macpherson answered him. Yes, a great deal of new evidence had come in. Yes, the Inspector thought Dalziel had better get back that night if he could. What a pity he had now just missed the 6.20 to Girvan. (Sergeant Dalziel gritted his teeth.) Well, it couldna be helped. Let him take the 7.30, getting in at 9.51, and a car would be sent to meet him.

The Sergeant replied, with a certain grim satisfaction, that the 9.51 only ran on Saturdays and the 9.56 only on Wednesdays, and that, this being a Thursday, they would have to meet him at 8.55 at Ayr. The Inspector retorted that in that case he had better hire a car at Ayr. Finding that there was no help for it, Sergeant Dalziel abandoned all hopes of a comfortable night of dinner, talkie and bed at Glasgow, and reluctantly retired to the refreshment-room for an early supper before catching the 7.30.

CHAPTER XI

INSPECTOR MACPHERSON

AT HEADQUARTERS, MEANWHILE, THE MARKET IN EVIDENCE was looking up. At least, as Wimsey observed to the Chief Constable, it was not looking up so much as looking about in all directions.

The first piece of excitement was provided by a young farmer, who presented himself rather diffidently at Kirkcudbright police-station and asked to see Inspector Macpherson.

It appeared that he had been having a drink at the Murray Arms in Gatehouse at about 9 o'clock on the Monday night, when Mr. Farren had come suddenly into the bar, looking very wild and queer, and had asked in a loud, peremptory tone, "Where's that b—— Campbell?" On perceiving that Campbell was not anywhere in the house, he had calmed down a little, and ordered two or three whiskeys in quick succession. The witness had tried to find out what the trouble was about, but had extracted nothing from Farren but a few vague threats. Presently, Farren had again started asking where Campbell was. Witness, who had lately come in from Kirkcudbright, and knew for a fact that Campbell was in the McClellan Arms, formed the opinion that Farren was in a dangerous mood and, in order to avert an encounter, had said, untruthfully, that he fancied he had seen Mr. Campbell in his car taking the road to Creetown. Farren had then muttered something about "getting him yet," adding a number of abusive epithets, from which witness gathered that the quarrel had something to

do with Mrs. Farren. He (Farren) had then hurried out of the bar and witness had seen him ride off, not, however, in the direction of Creetown, but towards Kirkcudbright. Witness had not felt satisfied and had run out after him. When, however, Farren had got as far as the War Memorial, he had turned off to the left along the road to the golf-links. Witness had then shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the matter from his mind.

On Wednesday, however, when it became clear, through the activities of the police, that Campbell was considered to have been murdered, the incident presented itself in a more sinister light. He (witness) had consulted with the barman at the Murray Arms and with one or two men who had been in the bar with him during Farren's visit, and they had decided that the police ought to be told. Witness had been chosen as spokesman, and here he was. Witness had been reluctant to get Mr. Farren into trouble, but murder was murder and there you were.

Macpherson thanked the farmer and immediately put an inquiry through to Creetown, to find out whether Farren had, after all, followed the false trail in that direction. It was puzzling that he should have turned off by the golf-links. He had left Campbell in Kirkcudbright some three hours previously, and it was likely enough that, failing to find him in Gatehouse, he should have gone back to search for him on the Kirkcudbright road. But why the golf-links? Unless ——

Unless he had gone to visit Strachan. Strachan and Farren were well known to be particularly friendly. Had there been some sort of complicity here? Had Strachan been at home between 9 and 10 on Monday night? That was comparatively easy to ascertain. The Inspector telephoned to Gatehouse for information and waited.

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Then came the second excitement of the day—much more definite and encouraging. It presented itself in the shape of a small and very timid child of about ten, haled along by a determined mother, who incited her offspring to speech by alternately shaking her and offering to “skelp her ower the lug” if she did not do as she was told.

“I kenned fine,” said the mother, “as she’d been up tae some mischief an’ I wadna rest while I’d got it oot o’ her. (Blow your nose an’ speak civil to the policeman, or he’ll hae ye locked up.) She’s a bad girl, stravaigin’ about the country wi’ the laddies, when she should be in her bed. But they’ll no listen tae their mithers these days. Ye canna do onything wi’ them.”

The Inspector expressed his sympathy, and asked the lady’s name.

“Mrs. McGregor, I am, an’ we have our cottage between Gatehouse an’ Kirkcudbright—ye’ll ken the place—near by Auchenhaye. Me an’ my man was away tae Kirkcudbright last Monday nicht, an’ Helen was alone at hame. An’ no sooner are we away than she’s away oot, leavin’ the door open behind her as like as not for onybody tae come in ——”

“Jist a moment,” said the Inspector. “This wee lassie will be Helen, I’m thinkin’.”

“Ay, that’s Helen. I thought it best tae bring her, seein’ as this puir Mr. Campbell has been pit oot o’ the way, so the postman says. An’ I says tae George, if Mr. Campbell was fightin’ on the road Monday night, then the pollis ought tae know it. An’ George says ——”

The Inspector interrupted again.

“If your wee Helen can tell us onything about Mr. Campbell, we wad like fine tae hear it. Now, Mistress McGregor, will ye jist let the lassie tell us her ain tale fra’ the begin-

ning. Come along, Helen, dinna be frightened, now. Speak up."

Helen, thus encouraged, began her story, which, between her own agitation and her mother's interruptions, was rather a tangled one. However, by dint of coaxing and the gift of a bag of sweeties which a constable was sent out to procure, the Inspector eventually succeeded in getting the tangle straightened out.

Mr. and Mrs. McGregor had gone over to Kirkcudbright on the Monday evening in a neighbour's car, to visit some friends, leaving Helen with strict instructions to lock the cottage door and put herself to bed. Instead of this, the abandoned child had gone out to play with some little boys belonging to a neighbouring farm. They had strayed down the road to some fields about half a mile away, where the boys were going to set some highly illegal rabbit-snares.

The Inspector shook his head slightly at this, but gave his promise that nothing dreadful should be done to the marauders, and Helen, who seemed to have been more troubled by this thought than by her mother's threats of punishment, went on more coherently with her story.

The place where they were looking for rabbits was about half-way between Gatehouse and Kirkcudbright, at a point where the road makes a very sharp and dangerous S-bend between two stone walls. It was a fine night, not dark, but dusk, and with a slight ground-mist lying in streaks on the hills. The boys had wandered well away into the fields and were intending to stay out much later, but at about a quarter to ten Helen, remembering that her parents would soon be home, had left them and started to go back by the road. She knew it was a quarter to ten, because one of the boys had a new watch which his grandfather had given him.

She crossed the fields and was just about to climb over

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the wall into the road, when she noticed a man in a car, drawn up stationary by the roadside and headed towards Gatehouse. The engine was running, and at that very moment, the driver pulled the car out across the road as though he was about to turn. At the same time, she heard another car approaching fast from the direction of Gatehouse.

She described the spot very exactly. It was not the sharpest and most dangerous part of the bend, where the walls are high on either side, but was what might be described as the lower bend of the S—the bend nearer Kirkcudbright. Here the turn is shallower and wider, and the wall on the side where she stood is a sunk wall, with gorse bushes and brambles beneath it. The approaching car came very quickly round the upper bend, just as the first car turned across the road, blocking the way. There was a sharp squeal of brakes, and the second car stopped, slewing violently to the right and avoiding a crash by a miracle. The driver had shouted out something and the first man had replied, and then the driver of the second car had said in a loud and angry tone, "Campbell! Of course! It would be Campbell"—or words to that effect.

Then there had been a sharp exchange of abuse, and Campbell had stopped his engine and got out. She had seen him jump on the other man's running-board. There was some sort of struggle and then, all in a moment, both men were out on the road, fighting and struggling. There were blows and a great deal of foul language. She could not see exactly what was going on, because the men were on the far side of the two cars. They had fallen to the ground and seemed to be rolling over one another. Nor could she say what the cars were like, except that Campbell's was a four-

seater and the other a large two-seater with very bright lights.

When the struggle had gone on for some little time, she got a bad fright. A big spanner was flung suddenly into the air. It just missed her head and fell close beside her. She cowered down again under the wall, afraid to stay where she was and yet anxious to find out what was happening. She heard horrid sounds as though somebody was being thumped and throttled. After a little time she peeped up again and saw something which frightened her still more. A man was getting up from the roadside, and over his shoulders he had got the body of another man. From the limp way in which it hung she thought the man must be dead. She didn't scream, because she was afraid if she did that the terrible man would hear her and kill her too. He carried the body over to the two-seater car and slumped it into the passenger's seat. This was the car which stood nearest to Gatehouse. She didn't see the face of the living man, because it was all bent down under the burden he was carrying, but as he passed in front of the lights of the four-seater to get to the other car she caught a glimpse of the dead man's face and it looked very dreadful and white. She couldn't describe it, except that she thought it was clean-shaven and the eyes were shut. The terrible man then got into the driver's seat and backed the two-seater away round the bend in the direction of Gatehouse. She heard the engine change its note, and the lights moved backwards and forwards as though the car were turning round. Then she heard it move off again, and the noise of the engine gradually died away.

When it had gone, she climbed up over the wall, and thought she would have a look at the four-seater car, which was still standing half-across the road. It was headed towards

Gatehouse, and its lights were turned towards the off-side of the road. Before she could examine it, however, she heard footsteps coming along from the direction of Gatehouse. She hoped it was somebody who would look after her and take her home, and then, suddenly, for no reason, it came over her that this was the bad man coming back to kill her. She was dreadfully alarmed, and started to run home as fast as she could. Then she heard an engine started up and hid herself in the bushes, thinking that the bad man was pursuing her in the car. Nothing came, however, and after a time she ventured out again and hurried home. Just as she got inside her own gate, a car flashed past at a furious pace towards Kirkcudbright. She got into the cottage just as the kitchen clock was striking ten. She rushed into the bedroom and jumped into bed, just as she was, and pulled the clothes over her head.

Mrs. McGregor then took up the tale. She and her husband had got home at 10.30, and found the child shivering and crying in bed with all her clothes on. She was so terrified that they could get nothing out of her. All they could do was to scold her soundly, undress her and put her to bed properly, give her a hot drink and stand by till she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. All next day she refused to tell them anything, but the next night she had woken them up three times by crying out in her sleep that the bad man was coming to kill her. On Wednesday evening, her father, who made a great pet of the child, succeeded in getting the story out of her, and when they heard the name of Campbell mentioned, they decided that the police ought to be told. In answer to a question of the Inspector's, Mrs. McGregor said that their kitchen clock was five or six minutes slow.

The Inspector thanked them both very much—and felt that he had indeed good reason to be grateful. He told

Helen that she was a brave lassie, begged her mother not to punish her, in view of the great importance of her story, and ended the interview with a strongly-worded caution against passing the story on to anybody else.

When they had gone, he sat back to think it out. The times agreed fairly well with the doctor's report, except that he was now obliged to place the actual moment of the murder rather earlier than he had expected. As he interpreted it, Campbell and the other man had met and quarrelled, and Campbell had been killed in the struggle. The murderer must then have pushed Campbell's body into the two-seater car and concealed it somewhere at the side of the road. Then he had come back, fetched Campbell's car, and driven it back to Gatehouse, where it would, of course, be wanted to stage the fake accident. At some later time, he must have come back, collected his own car with the body in it, and—well, what? Driven it back to Gatehouse?

The Inspector grunted. There were difficulties here. Why in the world had not the murderer put Campbell's body straight away into Campbell's Morris and driven off with it there and then? Why court discovery by leaving the body by the roadside for anyone to find during the time it would take him to drive the Morris back to Gatehouse and return on his bicycle? For he must have come back on a bicycle or on foot, if he was going to take his own car away. A bicycle was the obvious thing for him to use, and he might quite well have brought it back in the dicky of the two-seater. But the difficulty remained: why had he left the corpse behind him?

It was possible, thought Macpherson—indeed, it was more than possible—that the murderer had not at that time thought out the scheme of the alibi and the faked accident. Perhaps that explained it. He meant simply to drive away

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as though nothing had happened, and it was only afterwards that, having worked out his elaborate plan, he had returned to collect the corpse. But no! that would not work. It was Campbell's car that he had driven away with. The only explanation of that was that he had already planned the faked accident in his own mind. But that seemed simply incredible. Taking the child's account as reliable, which it appeared to be, it seemed obvious that the encounter between Campbell and the other man was fortuitous. Surely, in those few brief moments after the struggle, it would hardly have been possible for the murderer to work out his elaborate plan of escape.

And yet—*had* the meeting been, after all, fortuitous? Campbell's behaviour, if you came to think of it, suggested the exact contrary. He had planted his car in the road at the exact point where it was most difficult for two vehicles to pass, and when he had heard the other car coming, he had actually drawn out so as to block the way still further. A crazy thing to do, since it was more likely to provoke a fatal accident than any other kind of encounter. Still, it was known that Campbell was drunk at the time, and this might have blinded him to the risk of a collision.

But, if the witness was to be trusted (and, after all, he could not pick and choose, believing one bit of evidence and rejecting another to suit his own theories), then it was clear that, whoever had expected the meeting, it was not the murderer. And if the murderer had not foreseen the meeting, he could not have premeditated the crime, and so could not have prepared the faked alibi beforehand.

"Ay," said the Inspector to himself, "but that doesna follow, by no manner of means. He might weel ha' premeditated the alibi, intendin' tae commit the murder at some ither place or time. Then, meetin' wi' Campbell in that verra

convenient manner, he may ha' cairrit oot his nefarious design forthwith."

There still remained the difficulty about the car. And there was the account of the man who had driven so furiously along towards Kirkcudbright a short time after the encounter. Was he the murderer? Impossible, if the murderer was taking Campbell's car to Gatehouse. If he was somebody else, who was he? He must have passed the murderer on the road. He would have to be found. After a little further thought, the Inspector gave up this part of the problem as insoluble for the moment, and turned to another aspect of the matter.

How did this story fit in, if at all, with the evidence about Farren? And here, suddenly, the Inspector gave a great smack with his hand upon the table. Of course! the times fitted perfectly, and here was the explanation of why Farren had turned up the road to the golf-links. Evidently he had seen through the young farmer's well-meant lie about Cree-town. He had searched Gatehouse for Campbell and, failing to find him there, had come to the conclusion that he must be still in Kirkcudbright. He had then hurried off to see Strachan, obviously for the purpose of borrowing Strachan's car. Whether or not Strachan was an accomplice was not quite plain. Probably not. No. Again, the Inspector smacked the table with enlightenment. This explained the whole thing—the taking of the wrong car, the leaving the body and everything. Farren's original idea had been to put the guilt of the murder on Strachan. The body was to have been found in Strachan's car and the inference was to have been that Strachan had decoyed Campbell away and murdered him.

A very poor plan, of course. Strachan would immediately tell the story of how he had lent the car to Farren. Probably he would be able to produce witnesses of the trans-

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action. Moreover, the thing would in itself have a very unlikely appearance. What man would be fool enough to leave his own car lying about with a murdered body in it? This was, in fact, the very point which had immediately struck the Inspector himself, and Farren, when he thought over what he had done, could not fail to see how unreasonable his first idea was. But while driving Campbell's car back to Gatehouse, he would have time to think matters over. A better idea would occur to him—the idea of faking the accident at the Minnoch. What then? What would he do?

He would first, of course, take Campbell's car back and put it in the garage. Then he would have to go and collect his own bicycle from Strachan's house. At that time of night it would be easy enough to do so without being seen, supposing, as was possible, that he had left the machine somewhere handy—say, just inside the garden gate.

With considerable excitement, the Inspector drew a pad of paper towards him, and began to jot down a schedule of times, heading the document boldly: "The Case against Hugh Farren."

Monday.

- 6 p.m. Farren returns home and finds Campbell there. Turns him out of the house. (Jeanie's sister's evidence.)
- 7 p.m. After a quarrel with his wife, during which she presumably makes some damaging admission about Campbell, Farren departs on his bicycle.
- 9 p.m. Farren enters the Murray Arms, looking for Campbell. (The farmer's evidence.)
- 9.15 p.m. (about). Farren goes to Strachan's house and borrows car.

- 9.45 p.m. (about). Meeting with Campbell on the Kirkcudbright road. Murder of Campbell. (Helen McGregor's evidence.)
- 9.55 p.m. Farren plants the body in Strachan's car.
- 10 p.m. (or thereabouts). Farren starts back in Campbell's car.
- 10.10 p.m. Farren arrives in Gatehouse (say five miles) and garages Campbell's car.
- 10.30 p.m. Farren arrives on foot at Strachan's house to fetch bicycle.
- 11 p.m. Farren arrives on bicycle at the scene of the crime.
- 11.10 p.m. Farren is back with the body at Campbell's house. Hides the body in the house or garage.
- 11.20 p.m. Farren returns car to Strachan's house.
- 11.40 p.m. Farren is back at Campbell's house to prepare evidence of Campbell's having spent the night and breakfasted there.

The Inspector gazed with some complacency upon this schedule. Some of the times were, of course, only approximate, but the essential points corresponded well enough, and, making every allowance for Farren's being a slow walker, or bungling parts of his procedure, he had ample time to carry out all these manœuvres before Tuesday morning.

Encouraged by this, the Inspector proceeded, rather more tentatively, with the rest of his theory.

According to the evidence of "young Jock" at Borgan, the spurious Campbell had been seen sitting by the Minnoch at 10.10 on the Tuesday morning. This, therefore, gave the latest possible moment for Farren's arrival there. Actually, the Inspector thought it would probably have been

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earlier. Farren would certainly not have risked hanging about in Campbell's cottage very late in the morning. He would have been up and away well before 8 a.m., when Mrs. Green was due to arrive. On the other hand, he would not have started ridiculously early, because of Ferguson. It would be necessary that Ferguson, if he happened to hear Campbell's car go out, should be able to swear that it left at a reasonable hour in the morning. Accordingly, the Inspector put down at a venture:—

- 7.30 Farren leaves Campbell's house, wearing Campbell's hat and cloak, with the body tucked away on the floor of the car and the bicycle on top, all covered by the rug.
- 8.35 (say). Farren arrives at the Minnoch, hides the corpse and starts on his painting.
- 10.10 Farren (disguised as Campbell) seen by Jock for first time.
- 11.5 Farren seen by Jock for the second time.

Here the Inspector paused uncertainly. Was two-and-a-half hours too long to allow for the painting of that picture? He knew very little about artists, and the thing had seemed to him a rough and sketchy affair. He must ask somebody who knew.

But there! What a thick-headed fool he was! Of course, Farren could not begin to paint till the light was good. He mightn't know much, but he did know that. He thoughtfully shook a few blots from his fountain-pen and continued.

It now seemed very probable that Farren was the passenger at Girvan. The schedule would therefore run on:—

Tuesday.

11.10 a.m. Farren throws body into the river, puts on cap and overcoat and starts for Girvan on his bicycle.

1.7 p.m. Arrives at Girvan. Has bicycle labelled for Ayr.

1.11 p.m. Takes train for Ayr.

1.48 p.m. Arrives Ayr.

Here, for the moment, the Inspector's deductions came to an end. Dalziel, he knew, was following up the trail of the bicycle. It would be better to wait for his report before carrying the schedule any further. But he had not done so badly. He had at last succeeded in fixing the crime definitely upon one person, and in producing a plausible time-scheme to which to work. Fortunately, also, it was one that was susceptible of confirmation at several points.

He glanced over his paper again.

If Farren had been searching for Campbell in Gatehouse between 8 o'clock and 9.15, there ought to be evidence of other calls besides that at the Murray Arms. Inquiries would have to be made at the Angel and the Anwoth. But surely, before asking at public-houses, Farren would have tried Campbell's house. If so, it was almost impossible that he should not have been seen. For one thing, he would have had to cross the bridge twice, and there is no hour of the day at which the bridge at Gatehouse is not occupied by at least one idler. The bridge is the common club and gathering-place of the Gatehouse population, who meet there for the exchange of gossip, the counting of passing cars and rising trout, and the discussion of local politics. Even if, by a miracle, the bridge should have been clear on both occasions, there was the long bench outside the Anwoth Hotel,

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on which fishermen sit to tie knots, pat Bounce the dog and inquire of Felix the cat how many rats he has killed during the day. Lastly, supposing Farren to have escaped notice at both these points, there was always the possibility that Ferguson had been at home and had seen him come to the cottage.

Then, if Strachan's car had been taken out, surely somebody would know of it. Strachan himself might refuse information or lie stoutly in defence of his friend, but there still remained Mrs. Strachan, the child and the maid. They could not possibly all be in the plot. According to the theory, Farren had called three times at Strachan's—at about 9.15, to borrow the car; at about 10.40, to fetch the bicycle; at about 11.30, to return the car. The first and last of these visits at any rate ought to have left traces behind them.

Next, there were the three night visits to Campbell's house—the first, to garage Campbell's car; the second to bring in the body; the third, on foot, to fake the evidence. No, that was not necessarily correct. There might have been only two visits. It was more likely that on the first occasion the car had been left somewhere, to be picked up on the final visit. That would reduce the risk very considerably. In fact, the body might have been transferred to Campbell's car at some quiet spot, thus doing away with the necessity of entering Campbell's place twice in two different cars—a proceeding bound to arouse suspicion. The transfer could not, naturally, have taken place in Gatehouse itself—that would have been the act of a madman. But it might have been done anywhere between Kirkcudbright and Gatehouse, or on the unfrequented piece of road between the War Memorial and Strachan's house. Or, if Strachan was indeed involved, it might have been done still more quietly and safely at Strachan's house itself.

The Inspector made an alteration or two in his time-table to correspond with this new theory, and made a note to advertise for any passer-by who might have seen a Morris car with Campbell's number-plates stationary at any point on the route.

Finally, the Tuesday morning's journey could now be corroborated. If his calculations were exact, Campbell's car must have passed through Gatehouse a little after 7.30; through Creetown about 8 o'clock; and through Newton-Stewart at about 8.15. Somebody must undoubtedly have seen it. The Newton-Stewart police were, in fact, already investigating this point, but now that he could give them the approximate times, his task would be easier.

Inspector Macpherson put a call through to Newton-Stewart and another to Gatehouse, and then turned back with renewed appetite for a fresh bite at his problem.

And now he suddenly realised, what he had momentarily overlooked in working out his times, that he had one piece of hugely important evidence lying ready to his hand. With any luck at all, he had the weapon!

That heavy spanner, which had hurtled through the air and nearly laid out the unfortunate little Helen—what else could it be but the blunt instrument which had crashed in Campbell's skull? It was perhaps odd that it should have drawn no blood, but much depended on the kind of spanner it was. Anyway, the great thing was to get hold of it. The doctor would tell him if it was a suitable weapon to have inflicted the blow. How fortunate that the corpse was still above ground! It was to be buried next day. He must get hold of that spanner instantly. The Inspector was simmering with suppressed excitement as he pulled on his cap and hastened out to his car.

CHAPTER XII

FERGUSON'S STORY

ON THE SAME THURSDAY MORNING THAT TOOK SERGEANT Dalziel and Constable Ross to Ayr and set Inspector Macpherson to work at time-schedules, Lord Peter Wimsey presented himself at the farther of the two cottages at Standing Stone Pool.

The door was opened by Mr. Ferguson in person, palette in hand, and dressed in a pair of aged flannel bags, an open shirt and a shapeless and bulging jacket. He seemed a little disconcerted at the sight of an early visitor. Wimsey hastened to explain himself.

"I don't know if you remember me. My name's Wimsey. I fancy we met once at Bob Anderson's."

"Yes, of course. Come in. When I heard you knock I thought you were going to be a pound of sausages or the man from the greengrocer's. I'm afraid the place is in rather a mess. I've been away for a couple of days, and Mrs. Green seized the opportunity to tidy up, with the result that I've had to spend a couple of hours untidying it again." He waved his hand towards a litter of canvases, rags, dippers, bottles and other paraphernalia. "I never can find anything I want in a tidy studio."

"And now I've come bargin' in and interrupting you just as you were settling down to work."

"Not a bit. It doesn't worry me. Have a drink?"

"No, thanks, I've just had one. You carry on and don't mind me."

Wimsey cleared a number of books and papers from a chair and sat down, while Ferguson returned to the contemplation of a large canvas, in which Wimsey recognised the typical Ferguson of Graham's malicious description—the tree with twisted roots, the reflection, the lump of granite and the blue distance and the general air of decorative unreality.

"Been in Glasgow, haven't you?"

"Yes. Ran up to look at the show."

"Is it a good one?"

"Not bad." Ferguson squeezed out some green paint on to his palette. "Craig's got some fine studies, and there's a good thing of Donaldson's. The usual allowance of duds, of course. I really went to see the Farquharsons."

He added a blob of scarlet vermilion to the semi-circle of colours, and appeared to think that his palette was made up, for he took up a bunch of brushes and began to mix two or three paints together.

Wimsey asked a few more questions about the Exhibition, and then remarked carelessly:

"So you've lost your next-door neighbour."

"Yes. I don't care to think too much about that. Campbell and I were not exactly on the best of terms, but—I wish he could have departed some other way."

"It's all rather queer," said Wimsey. "I suppose you've had the police round, asking the usual questions."

"Oh, yes. Apparently it's just as well I had an alibi. I say, Wimsey—you know all about this kind of thing—I suppose it's a fact that he was—that it wasn't an accident?"

"That does seem to be the case, I'm afraid."

"What makes them think so?"

"Oh, well, I'm an outsider, you know, and of course the police aren't giving their game away. But I think it was

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something to do with his being dead before he got into the river and all that kind of guff, don't you know."

"I see. I heard something about a bash on the head. What's the idea? That somebody snooped up behind and did him in for his money?"

"Something like that, I daresay. Though, naturally, the police can't tell if he was robbed till they know how much he had on him. They're making inquiries at the bank and all that, I expect."

"Funny sort of place for a tramp to hang around, isn't it?"

"Oh, I dunno. There might have been some fellow sleepin' up there in the hills."

"H'm. Why couldn't he just have hit his head on the stones in falling?"

Wimsey groaned within himself. This perpetual parrying of pertinent questions was growing wearisome. One after another, everybody wanted to know the same thing. He replied, vacuously:

"Couldn't say. Seems on the whole the likeliest idea, don't it? If I were you, I'd ask the doctor johnnie."

"He wouldn't say, any more than you."

Ferguson went on for a few minutes dabbing paint on to his canvas in silence. Wimsey noticed that he seemed to be working at random, and was not surprised when he suddenly threw the palette on to the table and, turning round, demanded suddenly:

"Look here, Wimsey. Tell me one thing. It's no good your pretending you don't know, because you do. Is there any doubt at all that Campbell died the same morning that he was found?"

Wimsey felt as though he had suddenly received a jolt on the solar plexus. Whatever made the man ask that—if it was not the self-betrayal of a guilty conscience? Not being very

sure how to answer, he asked, quite simply, the question he had just asked himself.

"What ever makes you ask that?"

"And why ever can't you give me a straightforward answer?"

"Well," said Wimsey, "it seems such a damn funny question. I mean—oh, well, of course—perhaps they didn't tell you about the picture?"

"What picture?"

"The picture Campbell had been painting. The paint was still wet on it. So he must have been alive that morning, or he couldn't have painted it, could he?"

"Ah!" Ferguson let out a long breath, as though his mind were relieved of some anxiety. He picked his palette up again. "No, they didn't tell me about that. That settles it, of course."

He stepped back a couple of paces and regarded his canvas with head cocked and eyes half-shut.

"But what made you ask?"

"Well," said Ferguson. He took up a palette-knife and began scraping off all the paint he had just put on. "Well—the police have been asking questions. I wondered—— See here"—his face was close to the painting and he went on scraping without looking at Wimsey—"perhaps you can tell me what I ought to do about it."

"About what?" said Wimsey.

"About the police. The first thing they did was to go into my movements, starting from Monday night. That was simple enough, as far as Tuesday went, because I took the 9.8 to Glasgow and was there all day. But I had to admit that I was here all Monday night, and they became—damnably inquisitive."

"Did they? Well, I'm blessed."

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"That was why I wanted to know, don't you see? It's extremely unpleasant if—well, if there's any doubt about Campbell having been alive on the Tuesday morning."

"Yes, I see your point. Well, so far as I know—mind, I don't pretend to know everything—but so far as I know, anybody who has a complete alibi for Tuesday morning is perfectly safe."

"I'm glad of that. Not so much for my own sake, though naturally one isn't keen on being suspected of things. But—the fact is, Wimsey, I didn't quite know what to say to those fellows."

"Oh?" said Wimsey, his eyes all over the place. "I say, I like that thing over there, with the white cottages and the heather in the foreground. It sits very nicely up against the slope of the hill."

"Yes. It isn't so bad. I'll tell you what, Wimsey, after what you've said, I don't so much mind—that is, when those fellows were here, I thought there might possibly be something in it, so I—reserved judgment, so to speak. But perhaps I'd better spill the beans to you, and then you can say whether I ought to mention it. I'm not particularly anxious to make trouble. On the other hand, you know, I don't want to be an accessory to anything."

"If my opinion is worth anything," said Wimsey, "I'd say, cough it up. After all, if anybody did do the poor devil in, it's rather up to one to get it detected, and so on."

"I suppose it is, though one can't bring people to life again, unfortunately. If one could, of course, one wouldn't hesitate. Still ——"

"Besides," said Wimsey, "you never know which way evidence is going to work. People sometimes hang on to information with the bright idea of shieldin' their husbands or sons or best girls, and give the police a hell of a time, and

when it does come out, it proves to be the one thing in the world that was wanted to save their necks—the husbands' and sons' and best girls' necks I mean, of course."

Ferguson looked dissatisfied.

"If I only knew why they wanted to know about Monday night," he said, slowly.

"They want to find the last person who saw the man alive," said Wimsey, promptly. "It's always done. It's part of the regular show. You get it in all the mystery stories. Of course, the last person to see him never commits the crime. That would make it too easy. One of these days I shall write a book in which two men are seen to walk down a cul-de-sac, and there is a shot and one man is found murdered and the other runs away with a gun in his hand, and after twenty chapters stinking with red herrings, it turns out that the man with the gun did it after all."

"Well, nine times out of ten he has done it—in real life, that is—hasn't he? Well, I don't know."

"What *have* you told the police, anyhow?" asked Wimsey, losing patience a little, and fiddling with a tube of white paint.

"I said I'd been at home all evening, and they asked if I had seen or heard anything suspicious next door. I said I hadn't, and I can't say exactly that I did, you know. They asked if I'd seen Campbell come home and I said I hadn't seen him, but I'd heard the car come in. That was a little after 10. I heard it strike, and thought it was about time I pottered off to bed, as I had to catch a train next morning. I'd had a last drink and tidied up and picked out a book to read and had just toddled upstairs when I heard him."

"Was that the last you heard of him?"

"Ye—es. Except that I had a hazy kind of idea that I heard the door open and shut again shortly afterwards, as

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if he had gone out again. But I can't say for certain. He must have come back again later, if he did go out, because I saw him go out again in his car in the morning."

"Well, that's valuable. What time was that?"

"Some time between 7.30 and 7.45—I can't say to the moment. I was just finishing dressing. I had to get my own breakfast, you see, so as to catch the 'bus for the 9.8. It's six and a half miles to that bally station."

"You actually saw Campbell in the car?"

"Oh, yes, I saw him all right. At least, I suppose if I had to go into the witness-box, I could only swear to his clothes and general appearance. I didn't see his face. But there was no doubt it was Campbell all right."

"I see." Wimsey's heart, which had missed a beat, calmed down again. He had seen the handcuffs closing on Ferguson. If he had sworn to seeing Campbell alive at an hour when Wimsey knew him to have been dead——! But things were not made as easy as all that for detectives.

"What had he got on?"

"Oh, that hideous check cloak and the famous hat. There's no mistaking them."

"No. Well, what is it you didn't let up about?"

"One or two other things. First of all—though I don't see that that can have had anything to do with it—there was a sort of a hullabaloo about 8 o'clock on Monday evening."

"Was there? I say, Ferguson, I'm so sorry, I've burst a perfectly good Winsor & Newton tube. It's my beastly habit of fidgeting. It's all bulged out at the end."

"Has it? Oh, it doesn't matter. Roll it up. Here's a rag. Did you get it on your coat?"

"No, thanks, it's all right. What sort of hullabaloo?"

"Fellow came round banging on Campbell's door and

using language. Campbell was out—rather fortunately, because I gathered there was a perfectly good shindy brewing.”

“Who was the fellow?”

Ferguson glanced at Wimsey, then back at his canvas, and said in a low tone:

“As a matter of fact, I’m afraid it was Farren.”

Wimsey whistled.

“Yes. I stuck my head out and told him not to make such a filthy row and he asked me where the something-or-other that what-d’ye-call it Campbell was. I said I hadn’t seen him all day and advised Farren to remove himself. So then he started some rigmarole about always finding the so-and-so hanging round his place and he wanted to have it out with him, and if once he laid hands on Campbell he would do all kinds of nasty things to him, inside and out. Of course, I paid no attention to it. Farren’s always going off the deep end, but he’s like the Queen of Hearts—never executes nobody, you know. I told Farren to forget about it, and he told me to go and do this and that to myself, and by that time I’d got fed up, so I retorted that he could go away and hang himself, and he said that was exactly what he was going to do, only he must slay Campbell first. So I said, Right-ho! but not to disturb hard-working people. So he hung about a bit and then took himself off.”

“On his two legs?”

“No, on a bicycle.”

“Oh, yes, of course. He could hardly have walked from Kirkcudbright. I say, Ferguson, how much is there in that business about Mrs. Farren?”

“Damn all, if you ask me. I think Campbell was fond of her in his way, but she’s much too high-minded to get herself into trouble. She likes to do the motherly business—inspiration, you know, and influence of a pure woman. Do

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good, and never mind what the rude world says. Sweetness and beautiful lives and all that rot. Dash it! What have I done with the cobalt? Can't stick the woman, you know, never could. Oh! I've got it in my pocket, as usual. Yes. As you may know, my wife and I don't live together, and Gilda Farren takes it upon herself to lecture me. At least, I've choked her off now, but she once had the impertinence to try and 'bring us together.' Blast her cheek! She created a damned embarrassing situation. Not that it matters now. But I can't stick those interfering, well-meaning bitches. Now, whenever she meets me, she looks mournfully and forgivingly in my eyes. I can't stand that kind of muck."

"Beastly," agreed Wimsey. "Like the people who offer to pray for you. Did Farren depart altogether, or did he by any chance come back?"

"I don't know. That's just the point. *Somebody* came later on."

"When was that?"

"Just after midnight, but I didn't get up to see who it was. Somebody knocked at the door and presently whoever it was went in, but I didn't bother to get up and look. And then I went off to sleep."

"And didn't hear the person go?"

"No. I've no idea how long he—or she—stayed."

"She?"

"I say he or she, because I really haven't the least idea which it was. I don't think it was Farren, though, because I fancy I heard a car. You might give me that rag, if you've finished with it. I'm really frightfully vague about the whole business. To tell the truth, I thought it was Jock Graham up to his games again."

"That's quite likely. H'm. If I were you, Ferguson, I think I'd mention it."

"What? Just that midnight visitor, do you mean? Or Farren as well?"

"Farren too. But particularly the midnight person. After all, he apparently *was* the last to see Campbell alive."

"What do you mean? I saw him in the morning."

"Saw him to speak to," said Wimsey. "He might be able to give the police valuable help, if they could get hold of him."

"Why hasn't he come forward, then?"

"Oh, Lord! a hundred reasons. He may have been selling illicit salmon, or, as you say, he may have been she. One never knows."

"True. All right. I'll come clean, as they say. I'd better do it at once, or they'll think I know more than I do."

"Yes," said Wimsey. "I shouldn't waste any time."

He wasted none himself, but drove straight back to Kirkcudbright, where he met Inspector Macpherson just stepping into his car.

CHAPTER XIII

LORD PETER WIMSEY

"HULLO—ULLO—ULLO!" CRIED WIMSEY. "WHERE ARE you off to? I've got something for you."

The Inspector clambered out of the car again and greeted Wimsey cordially.

"Weel, noo," said he, "I had something tae show ye, too. Wull ye step intae the station a wee while?"

The Inspector was in no way sorry to get someone to admire his time-schedule, and Wimsey applauded generously. "What's more," said he, "I can fill up a blank or two for you."

He unfolded his budget, while the Inspector sat licking his lips.

"Ay," said the latter, "'tis a' clear as daylight. Puir Farren—he must ha' been in a rare way tae go and do such a thing. Peety we ha' lost sae much time. It's a hundred to one he's oot o' the country by noo."

"Out of the country or out of the world," suggested Wimsey.

"Ay, that's a fact. He said he wad hae 't oot wi' Campbell an' then mak' away wi' himsel'. They often says it an' doesna do't, but whiles they do't a' the same."

"Yes," said Wimsey.

"I'm thinking," pursued Macpherson, "we'll no be far wrang if we send a search-party up into them hills beyond Creetown. Ye'll mind the sad affair there was a year or two ago, with the puir woman as threw hersel' doon one o' the auld lead-mines. Where there's been trouble once there

may be again. It wad be a terrible thing if the puir man's body was to be lyin' up yonder and us not tae find it. Ay. D'ye ken, my lord, I'm thinkin' this'll juist be the verra thing that Mistress Farren's fearin', though she disna like tae say so."

"I absolutely agree," said Wimsey. "I think she believes her husband's killed himself, and daren't say so because she suspects he may have done the murder. You'd better get your sleuth-hounds out at once, Inspector, and then we'll pop along and have a hunt for this spanner."

"There's a terrible deal of work tae be done," said Macpherson. "I'll doot we'll no have men enough for a' these investigations."

"Cheer up," said Wimsey. "You've pretty well narrowed it down now, haven't you?"

"Ay," replied the Inspector, cautiously, "but I'm no countin' upon it. There's mony a slip, an' I'm no losin' sight o' ony o' my suspectit pairsons, juist yet awhile."

Wee Helen had described the site of Campbell's encounter with the man in the car so exactly that there was no necessity to take her along with them to point it out. "We'll be mair comfortable and private-like on our own," observed Macpherson, and heaved himself with a sigh of contentment into the front seat of Wimsey's huge Daimler. Six or seven minutes brought them to the bend. Here Wimsey deposited the Inspector, and here, after stowing the car out of the way of other travellers, he joined him in his search.

According to Helen's story, she had taken up her position beneath the sunk wall, on the left-hand side of the road going towards Gatehouse. Wimsey and Macpherson therefore started, one at either end of the bend, searching within a couple of yards from the wall and working gradually towards one another. It was back-breaking exercise, for the grass was

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rather long, and as he groped, Wimsey found himself versifying after the manner of the old man sitting on a gate.

*"But I was scheming to devise
A wheeze to catch the spanner,
With magnets of uncommon size,
And sell it for a tanner,*

*Or train a pack of skilful hounds
To scent it like a rabbit,
And something, something, something—ounds
And something, something habit."*

He paused and straightened his spine.

"Not very lively," he mused; "better, I think, for a Heath Robinson picture.

*Or purchase half a ton of flints
And hurl them in the dark
And something or the other ending in glints,
And a last line ending in see the spark.*

I ought to have brought Bunter. This is menial toil. It's really beneath the dignity of any human being, unless one is like the army of Napoleon which is popularly reputed to have marched on its belly. Hullo! hullo! hullo!"

His walking-stick—which he carried with him everywhere, even in the car, for fear that by some accident he might be obliged to stagger a few steps when he got to places—struck against something which gave out a metallic noise. He stooped, looked, and let out a loud yell.

The Inspector came galloping up.

"Here you are," said Wimsey, with conscious pride.

It was a big King Dick spanner, slightly rusty with the dew, lying within a couple of feet of the wall.

"Ye've no touched it?" asked the Inspector, anxiously.

"What do you take me for?" retorted Wimsey, hurt.

Macpherson knelt down, drew out a tape-measure and solemnly measured the distance of the spanner from the wall. He then peered over the wall into the road and, drawing out his notebook, made a careful plan of the exact position. After that, he took out a large jack-knife and thrust it in among the stones of the wall, by way of making the indication still more precise, and only after performing these rites did he very gingerly lift the spanner, covering his fingers with a large white handkerchief and wrapping the folds of the linen tenderly about it.

"There might be finger-prints, ye ken," said he.

"Ay, there might," agreed Wimsey, in the language of the country.

"And then we've only tae get the prints of Farren and compare them. How will we do that now?"

"Razor," said Wimsey, "palette-knife, picture-frames, pots—anything in his studio. Studios are never dusted. I suppose the actual riot took place on the other side of the road. There won't be much trace of it now, I'm afraid."

The Inspector shook his head.

"It's no likely, wi' cars and cattle passin' up and doon. There was no bloodshed, an' this dry grass takes no marks, mair's the pity. But we'll tak' a look round."

The tarmac itself betrayed nothing, and the indications in the grass were so vague that nothing could be made of them. Presently, however, Wimsey, beating about among a tuft of bramble and bracken, uttered a small astonished noise.

"What's that?" asked Macpherson.

"What indeed?" said Wimsey. "It's one of these problems, Inspector, that's what it is. Did you ever hear of the Kilkenny cats that fought till only their tails were left behind

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them? Now here are two gentlemen having a fight, and both of them spirited away, leaving only a tuft of hair. And what's more, it's the wrong colour. What do you make of that?"

He held up in his hand a tuft of curly blackness suggestive of an Assyrian wall-painting.

"That's a queer thing," said Macpherson.

"Cut off, not torn out," said Wimsey. He pulled a lens from his pocket and examined the trophy carefully. "It's soft and silky, and it's never been trimmed at the distal end; it might come from one of those sweet old-fashioned, long-haired girls, but the texture's a bit on the coarse side. It's a job for an expert, really, to say where it does come from."

The Inspector handled it carefully and peered through the lens with as much intelligence as he could assume on the spur of the moment.

"What makes ye say it's never been trimmed?" he inquired.

"See how the points taper. Is there a female in the country with hair so black and so curly, that's never been shingled or bingled? Were our blokes wrestling for a love-token, Inspector? But whose? Not Mrs. Farren's, unless she's turned from a Burne-Jones to a Rossetti in the night. But if it isn't Mrs. Farren's, Inspector, where's our theory?"

"Hoots!" said the Inspector. "Maybe it has naething tae do wi' the case at a'."

"How sensible you are," said Wimsey, "and how imperturbable. Calm without something or other, without o'erflowing, full. Talking of that, how soon will the pubs be open? Hullo! here's another bunch of hair. Some love-token! I say, let's trot home with this and interview Bunter. I've a notion it may interest him."

"Ye think so?" said Macpherson. "Weel, that's no a bad idea, neither. But I'm thinkin' we'll better be away tae

Newton-Stewart first. We'll have tae find the doctor and get the undertaker tae open the coffin. I've a great fancy tae see how this spanner fits yon wound in the heid."

"Very good," said Wimsey, "so have I. But just a minute. We'd better have a look first and see if we can find out what happened to the body. The murderer stuck it into his car and drove off towards Gatehouse with it. He can't have gone far, because he very soon came back for Campbell's Morris, so there ought to be a gate about here somewhere. In fact, I fancy I remember seeing one."

The search did not take long. About fifty yards farther along the bend they came to a rusty iron gate on the right-hand side. This led into a grassy lane which, after about thirty yards, turned abruptly to the left and was hidden behind some bushes.

"Here's the place," said Wimsey. "There's been a car up here lately. You can see where the wing scraped the post. The gate has a hook and chain—easy enough to undo. He must have backed it in up to the bend. Then, if he turned the lights off, it would be absolutely invisible from the road. There's no difficulty about that, and there's no other possible hiding-place for a mile or so, I'm certain of that. Well, that's uncommonly satisfactory. I gloat, as Stalky says. Back we go to the car, Inspector. Spit on your hands and grasp the coachwork firmly. I'm feeling sprightly, and I'm going to break all records between here and Newton-Stewart."

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Dr. Cameron was greatly interested in the spanner, and experienced so much difficulty in keeping his hands off it, that it was thought best to have it tested for finger-prints before anything else was done. By the combined exertions of the police-staff, the local photographer and Wimsey, this

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was done. A magnificent thumb-print made its appearance after a dusting with mercury powder, and a perfectly good negative was "secured," to use the journalist's pet phrase.

In the meantime, a constable had rounded up the undertaker, who arrived in great excitement, swallowing the last fragments of his tea. A slight further delay was caused by its occurring to somebody that the Fiscal should be notified. The Fiscal, fortunately enough, happened to be in the town, and joined the party, explaining to Wimsey as they drove along to the mortuary that this was the most painful case he had handled in the whole of his experience, and that he had been much struck by the superiority of the Scots law to the English in these matters. "For," said he, "the publicity of a coroner's inquest is bound to give much unnecessary pain to the relations, which is avoided by our method of private investigation."

"That is very true," said Wimsey, politely, "but think of all the extra fun we get from the Sunday newspapers. Inquests are jam to them."

"We then proceeded," ran Inspector Macpherson's official notes on this occasion, "to the mortuary, where the coffin was unscrewed in the presence of the Fiscal, Dr. Cameron, James McWhan (the undertaker), Lord Peter Wimsey and myself, and the body of Campbell extracted. On comparison of the spanner formerly mentioned with the wounds upon the head of the corpse, Dr. Cameron gave it as his opinion that a contused area upon the left cheek-bone agreed exactly in contour with the head of the said spanner and had in all probability been inflicted by that or by a similar instrument. With regard to the larger contused area upon the temple, which had occasioned death, Dr. Cameron could not speak with certainty, but said that its appearance was consistent with the use of the said spanner."

After this triumphant entry, which bears the marks of considerable literary effort, appears another.

"Acting upon the suggestion of Lord Peter Wimsey" (the Inspector was a just man, giving honour where it was due, regardless of his own lacerated feelings), "the finger-prints of the corpse were then taken." (This last phrase is erased, and a better locution substituted), "a record was then secured of the finger-prints of the corpse. On comparison of this record with the thumb-print found upon the spanner, these were both found to be identical. Acting upon instructions, I dispatched both records to Glasgow for expert scrutiny."

In this stately paragraph, nothing is said of the bitter disappointment experienced by the Inspector. It had seemed to him, with that finger-print in his hands, as though his case were concluded, and now, suddenly, he was taken up and cast down into the old outer darkness of uncertainty and gnashing of teeth. But his behaviour was handsome to the last degree.

"It's a great maircy," said he to Wimsey, "that your lordship should ha' taken the notion tae have that done. It wad never have entered my heid. We might have eliminated a' six suspects on the strength o' that deceivin' finger-print. It was a gran' notion of yours, my lord, a gran' notion."

He sighed deeply.

"Cheer up," said Wimsey. "It's all the luck of the game. Come and have a spot of dinner with me at the Galloway Arms."

Now that was an unlucky suggestion.

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The gathering in Bob Anderson's studio was well attended

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that night. Bob was an artist, the geniality of whose temperament is best vouched for by the fact that it had never for one moment occurred to anybody engaged on the case that he could by any chance have hated Campbell, damaged Campbell, or been mixed up for a single moment in the Campbell mystery. He had lived in Kirkcudbright for nearly as many years as Gowan, and was extremely popular, not only with all the artists, but also with the local inhabitants, particularly with the fishermen and the men employed about the harbour. He seldom visited anybody, preferring to be at home every evening in the week, and all the news of the town was bound to filter through Bob's studio in time.

When Wimsey poked his long nose round the door on that Thursday evening, he found a full house already assembled. Miss Cochran and Miss Selby were there, of course, and Jock Graham (in a remarkable costume, comprising a fisherman's jersey, a luggage strap, riding-breeches and rope-soled deck-shoes), and Ferguson (rather surprisingly, for he did not as a rule go out of an evening), the Harbour-master, the doctor, Strachan (his black eye almost faded out), a Mrs. Terrington, who worked in metal, a long, thin, silent man, called Temple, of whom Wimsey knew nothing except that his handicap was five at St. Andrews, and finally, Mrs., Miss and young Mr. Anderson. The babble of conversation was terrific.

Wimsey's entrance was greeted by a welcoming shout.

"Here he is! Here he is! Come away in! Here's the man to tell us all about it!"

"All about what?" said Wimsey, knowing only too well. "What to back for the Leger?"

"Leger be damned. All about this business of poor Campbell. It's terrible the way the police come running in and out of one's house. One doesn't feel safe for a moment.

Luckily I've got a cast-iron alibi, or I'd begin to feel I was a criminal myself."

"No, Bob, not you," said Wimsey.

"Oh, ye never know these days. But very fortunately I was at dinner with the Provost Monday night and didn't get home till midnight, and on Tuesday morning I was showing myself up and down St. Cuthbert's Street. But tell us, Wimsey, you that's hand in glove with the police——"

"I'm not allowed to tell anything," said Wimsey, plaintively. "You mustn't tempt me. It's not fair. I could not love thee, Bob, so much, loved I not honour more. Besides, I'm supposed to be finding things out, not giving information away."

"Well, you're welcome to all we know," said Miss Selby.

"Am I?" said Wimsey. "Tell me, then, how many hundred people in the county, besides Jock, knew that Campbell meant to go up to the Minnoch on Tuesday?"

"You had better ask who did not?" said the doctor. "He said so here on the Sunday night. He'd been making a preliminary sketch that afternoon. Monday he was going to fish in some wonderful place he wouldn't tell anybody about——"

"I know where it was, all the same," put in Graham.

"You would. And Tuesday he was going to paint the Minnoch if the weather held. You heard him say so, Sally."

"I did," said Miss Cochran.

"I was here, too," said Ferguson, "and I remember it perfectly. I fancy I said something about it to Farren on the Monday morning, because he had a tea-party or something fixed up for Brighthouse Bay on Tuesday and said he hoped they wouldn't run into Campbell."

"I knew, too," said Strachan. "My wife and I met him up there on Sunday, as I think I mentioned to Wimsey."

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Wimsey nodded. "Campbell seems to have been more communicative than usual," he remarked.

"Och," said Bob, "Campbell was not such a bad fellow if you took him the right way. He had an aggressive manner, but I believe it was mostly due to a feeling that he was out of everything. He used to have awful arguments with people ——"

"He was an opinionated man," said the Harbour-master.

"Yes, but that made it all the more amusing. One couldn't take Campbell seriously."

"No, one couldn't," said Graham.

"Gowan did, for one," said the doctor.

"Ah, but Gowan takes everything very seriously, and himself most of all."

"All the same," said Mrs. Anderson, "Campbell ought not to have spoken of Gowan as he did."

"Gowan's away, isn't he? They told me he had gone to London. By the way, Wimsey, what's happened to Waters?"

"I haven't the foggiest. As far as I can make out, he's supposed to be in Glasgow. Did you see anything of him, Ferguson?"

"No. The police asked me that. Do I take it that Waters is suspected of anything?"

"Waters was here on Sunday night," observed the doctor, "but he didn't stay very long after Campbell came in."

"You're a great man for facts, doctor. But if Waters was in Glasgow he couldn't have been up at the Minnoch."

"The odd thing," said Miss Selby, "is that nobody saw him in Glasgow. He was supposed to be going by our train, but he didn't, did he, Mr. Ferguson?"

"I didn't see him. But I wasn't looking out for him particularly. I saw you two get in at Dumfries, and I saw you again with your party at St. Enoch Station. But I went

off in rather a hurry. I had some shopping to do before I got down to the show. As a matter of fact, the whole thing was very irritating. Something went wrong with my magneto, otherwise I should have got up early and run over to catch the 7.30 express from Dumfries, instead of waiting for that ghastly 11.22, which stops at every station."

"Rather than travel by a confirmed stopper," said Wimsey, "I'd have waited a little longer and gone by the 1.46."

"Taking the 10.56 from Gatehouse, you mean?"

"Or the 11 o'clock 'bus. It gets you in to Dumfries at 12.25."

"No, it doesn't," said Strachan. "That's the Sunday 'bus. The week-day 'bus goes at 10."

"Well, anyway, I couldn't," said Ferguson, "because I'd made an appointment to meet a man at the show at 3.15, and the 1.46 doesn't get in to Glasgow till 3.34. So I had to make a martyr of myself. And the sickening thing was that my man never turned up after all. I found a note at my hotel, saying he'd been called to see a sick relative."

"Sick relatives ought to be forbidden by law," said Wimsey.

"Yes; I was damned fed-up. However, I took my mag. along to Sparkes & Crisp, and it's still there, confound it. Something obscure in the armature winding, as far as I could make out—I don't think they knew themselves. And it's practically a new car, too; only done a few thousand. I'm claiming under guarantee."

"Oh, well," said Wimsey, consolingly, "Sparkes & Crisp will provide a nice little alibi for you."

"Yes; I don't know exactly when I got there, but they'll be able to say. I took a tram up. I should think I got to their

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place about 3 o'clock. The train was a quarter of an hour late, of course; it always is."

"It was nearer twenty minutes late," said Miss Selby, severely. "We were very much annoyed about it. It cut down our time with Kathleen."

"Local trains always are late," said Wimsey. "It's one of the rules. It's done so that the guard and the engine-driver can step out and admire the station-master's garden at every stop. You know those gardening competitions they have in railway magazines. Well, that's how they're run. The guard gets off at Kirkgunzeon or Brig o' Dee with a yard measure in his hand and measures the prize marrow and says: 'Twa fut four inches—that'll no dew, Mr. McGeoch. They've got one at Dalbeattie that beats ye by twa inches. Here, George, come and look at this.' So the engine-driver strolls over and says, 'Och, ay, imph'm, ye'll dew weel tae gie't a mulch o' liquid guano and aspidistra tonic.' And then they go back to Dalbeattie and tell them that the marrow at Kirkgunzeon is hauling up on them hand over fist. It's no good laughing. I know they do it. If not, what on earth do they do, hanging everlastingly about at these three-by-four stations?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," said Miss Anderson, "talking such nonsense, with poor Mr. Campbell lying dead."

"They're burying him to-morrow, aren't they?" said Jock Graham, suddenly and tactlessly. "At Gatehouse. Does one go? I haven't any wedding-garments."

"Oh, dear," said Bob. "Never thought of that. We must go, I suppose. Look odd if we didn't. Besides, I'd like to show respect to the poor fellow. Surely we can go as we are."

"You can't go in those terrific tweeds, Bob," said Miss Selby.

"Why not?" demanded Bob. "I can feel just as sorry in a

check suit as in a frock-coat smelling of moth-balls. I shall go in my ordinary working clothes—with a black tie, naturally. Can you see me in a top-hat?"

"Dad, you are dreadful," said Miss Anderson.

"My God!" said Wimsey. "I hope Bunter has remembered to order a wreath. I expect he has. He remembers everything. Did you decide to send one from the Club, Strachan?"

"Oh, yes," said Strachan. "We all agreed it was the right thing to do."

"The trouble with Campbell," said the five-handicap man unexpectedly, "was that he was a bad loser. A slice off the tee or a fozzled approach-shot would put him off his game for the afternoon."

Having unburdened his mind of this criticism, he retired in obscurity again and spoke no more.

"He was having a one-man show in London this autumn, wasn't he?" said Ferguson.

"I expect his sister will carry on with that," said the doctor. "It will probably be a great success."

"I never know what the doctor means by those remarks," said young Anderson. "What's the sister like, by the way? Has anybody seen her?"

"She called here yesterday," said Mrs. Anderson. "A nice, quiet girl. I liked her."

"What did she think about it all?"

"Well, Jock, what could she think? She seemed very much distressed, as you would expect."

"No idea of who might have done it, I suppose?" suggested Wimsey.

"No—I gathered that she hadn't seen anything of her brother for some years. She's married to an engineer in

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Edinburgh, and, though she didn't say much, I rather fancy the two men didn't hit it off very well."

"It's all very unpleasant and mysterious," said Mrs. Anderson. "I hope very much it'll all turn out to be a mare's nest. I can't really believe that anybody about here could have committed a murder. I think the police are just anxious to make a sensation. Probably it was only an accident, after all."

The doctor opened his mouth, but caught Wimsey's eye, and shut it again. Wimsey guessed that his colleague at Newton-Stewart must have said something, and hastened to lead the conversation away on lines which would at the same time convey a warning and possibly also elicit useful information.

"A great deal," he said, "depends on how long Campbell actually spent at the Minnoch on Tuesday. We know—at least, Ferguson knows—that he started out about 7.30. It's about twenty-seven miles—say he got up there between 8.30 and 8.45. How long would it take him to do his sketch?"

"Starting from scratch?"

"That's just what one can't be sure of. But say he set out with a blank canvas."

"Which he probably did," said Strachan. "He showed me his rough sketch in his sketch-book on Sunday, and on Monday he didn't go up."

"So far as we know," said Ferguson.

"Exactly. So far as we know."

"Well, then?" said Wimsey.

"We haven't seen the picture," said Bob. "So how can we tell?"

"Look here," said Wimsey. "I know how we could get a rough idea. Supposing all you fellows were each to start off with a panel that size and a rough charcoal outline—could

you kind of fudge something up, imitating Campbell's style as much as possible, 'while I stood over you with a stop-watch? We could take the average of your speeds and get a sort of line on the thing that way."

"Reconstruct the crime?" said young Anderson, laughing.

"In a sense."

"But Wimsey, that's all very well. No two men paint at the same rate, and if I, for instance, tried to paint like Campbell, with a palette-knife, I should make an awful muck of it, and get nowhere."

"Possibly—but then your styles are so very unlike, Ferguson. But Jock can imitate anybody, I know, and Waters said it would be easy to fake a perfectly plausible Campbell. And Bob here is an expert with the knife."

"I'll be sporting, Lord Peter," said Miss Selby, surprisingly. "If it's really going to do any good, I don't mind making a fool of myself."

"That's the spirit," said Graham. "I'm on, Peter."

"I don't mind having a dash at it," said Strachan.

"All right, then," said Bob. "We all will. Have we got to go up to the scene of the tragedy, old man?"

"Starting at 7.30?" said Miss Selby.

"It's no good getting there too early," objected Strachan, "because of the light."

"That's one of the things we've got to prove," said Wimsey. "How soon he could have got going on it."

"Ugh!" said Bob Anderson. "It's against my principles to get up in the small hours."

"Never mind," said Wimsey. "Think how helpful it may be."

"Oh, well—is it to-morrow morning you're thinking of?"

"The sooner the better."

"Will you convey us there?"

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"In the utmost luxury. And Bunter shall provide hot coffee and sandwiches."

"Be sporting," said Miss Selby.

"If we must ——" said Bob.

"I think it's monstrous," said Ferguson. "Going over in car-loads like that and having a picnic. What will people take us for?"

"What does it matter what they take us for?" retorted Graham. "I think you're absolutely right, Wimsey. Damn it all, we *ought* to do what we can. I'll be there. Come on, Ferguson, don't you let us down."

"I'll come if you like," said Ferguson, "but I do think it's rather disgusting, all the same."

"Miss Selby, Bob, Strachan, Ferguson, Graham, and me as timekeeper. Coffee and palette-knives for six. Strachan, you'd better run Ferguson and Graham up, and I'll take the Kirkcudbright contingent. I'll get a police witness as well. That's fine."

"I believe you enjoy it, Lord Peter," said Mrs. Terrington. "I suppose you get carried away by these investigations."

"They are always interesting," admitted Wimsey. "Every man is thrilled by his own job. Isn't that so, Mr. Doulton?" he added, addressing the Harbour-master.

"That's so, my lord. I remember having tae du much the same thing, mony years since, in an inquest upon a sailing-vessel that ran aground in the estuary and got broken up by bumping herself to bits in a gale. The insurance folk thocht that the accident wasna a'tegither straightforward. We tuk it upon oorsels tae demonstrate that wi' the wind and tide settin' as they did, the boat should ha' been well away fra' the shore if they had started at the hour they claimed to ha' done. We lost the case, but I've never altered my opeenion."

"That estuary can be awkward if you don't know the channels," said Bob.

"Ay, that's true. But a man of experience, as this skipper was, should no ha' made such a mistake, unless indeed he was drunk at the time."

"That's a thing that might happen to anybody," said Wimsey. "Who were those fellows that were kicking up such a row in the town over the week-end?"

"Och, they were juist a couple a' English gentlemen fra' the wee yacht that was anchored up by the Doon," said the Harbour-master, placidly. "There was nae harm in them at a'. Verra decent, hospitable fellows, father and son, and knew how tae handle a boat. They were aff on Tuesday mornin', makin' their way up the west coast to Skye, they tell't me."

"Well, they've got fine weather for it," said the doctor.

"Ay, imph'm. But I'm thinkin' there'll be a bit of a change the nicht. The wind's shiftin', and there's one o' they depressions coming over fra' Iceland."

"I wish they'd keep their depressions at home," grumbled Wimsey, thinking of his experiment.

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The meeting did not break up till 11 o'clock. Stepping out into the street, Wimsey became immediately aware of the change in the weather. A soft dampness beat on his cheek, and the sky was overcast with a close veil of drifting cloud.

He was about to turn into Blue Gate Close, when he saw, far away at the end of the street, the red tail-lamp of a car. It was difficult to judge distances in the close blackness, but his instinct seemed to tell him that the car was standing before Gowan's house. Possessed by curiosity, he strolled down the street towards it. Presently, straining eyes and ears,

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he seemed to hear a stir of low voices, and to see two muffled figures cross the pavement.

"Something's happening!" he said to himself, and started to run, noiselessly, on rubber soles. Now he heard distinctly enough the starting of the engine. He redoubled his speed.

Something tripped him—he stumbled and sprawled headlong, bruising himself painfully. When he picked himself up, the red tail-light was vanishing round the corner.

The Harbour-master appeared suddenly at his elbow, assisting him to rise.

"It's a fair scandal," said the Harbour-master, "the way they doorsteps is built right oot tae the edge o' the pavement. Are ye hurt, my lord? The Council should du something aboot it. I remember, when I was a young man——"

"Excuse me," said Wimsey. He rubbed his knees and elbows. "No harm done. Forgive me, won't you? I have an appointment."

He dashed off in the direction of the police-station, leaving the Harbour-master to stare after him in surprise.

CHAPTER XIV

CONSTABLE ROSS

THE NEXT DAY DAWNED WILD AND STORMY, WITH HEAVY rain and violent squalls of southwest wind. Wimsey's sketching-party was perforce postponed. Nevertheless, the day was not wholly lacking in incident.

The first thing that happened was the sudden return of Constable Ross from Ayr, with a remarkable story.

He had gone out on the previous night to Kilmarnock, to investigate the history of a bicyclist in a burberry, who had been seen to leave Ayr station shortly after 1.48. This trail, however, had petered out. He found the man without the least difficulty. He proved to be a perfectly innocent and respectable young farmer who had come to the station to inquire about some goods lost in transit.

Ross had then made further inquiries in and about the town, with the following result.

The bookstall clerk had seen the passenger in grey pass his bookstall at 1.49, in the direction of the exit. He had not seen him actually leave the station, because of the corner of the bookstall, which cut off his view of the exit.

A taxi-driver, standing just outside the station exit, had seen a young man in a burberry come out with a bicycle. (This was the farmer whom Ross subsequently interviewed.) He also saw a youngish man in a cap and a grey flannel suit come out, carrying a small attaché-case, but without a bicycle. A fare had then hailed him and he had driven away, but he fancied he had seen the man in grey turn into a small side-

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street. This would be about two minutes after the Stranraer train came in—say, at 1.50.

At about 2.20, a porter who was taking along a truck of luggage to the 2.25 for Carlisle, noticed a man's bicycle standing against a board which displayed time-tables and railway posters, just above the bays on the booking-hall side of the platform. He examined it and found that it had an L.M.S. label for Euston. He knew nothing about it, except that he had a dim impression that it had been there for some little time. Supposing that it was in charge of one of his colleagues and possibly belonged to some passenger who was breaking his journey at Carlisle, he left it where it was. At 5 o'clock, however, he noticed that it was still there, and asked the other porters about it. None of them remembered handling it or labelling it, but since it was there, with its label all in order, he did his duty by it and put it into the 5.20 express for Euston. If the passenger to whom it belonged had travelled by the 2.25, the bicycle would arrive in Euston by the same train as himself, for the 2.25 does not run to Euston, and London passengers would have to change at Carlisle and wait two-and-a-quarter hours till the 5.20 came in to take them on.

This porter, having had his attention particularly directed to the bicycle, had examined it fairly closely. It was a Raleigh, not new and not in very good condition, but with good tyres front and back.

Ross jumped when he heard this description, and eagerly examined all the porters. He completely failed, however, to discover the man who had affixed the Euston label to it, or to get any information about its owner.

The booking-clerk had issued ten tickets to Carlisle by the 2.25—five third singles, three third returns, a first single and a first return—and two third singles to Euston. He had

issued no long-distance bicycle-ticket by that train or by the 5.20, which had carried eight passengers from Ayr. A porter, not the same man who had put the bicycle into the 5.20, remembered a gentleman in a grey suit who had travelled to Carlisle on the 2.25 without luggage; he had asked him some question about the route, which was via Mauchline. This person did not wear glasses and had said nothing at all about any bicycle, nor had any passenger by the 5.20 mentioned a bicycle.

Constable Ross next endeavoured to trace the man in the grey suit who had vanished down the side-street, but without success. It was a small alley, rather than a street, containing nothing but the back-entrances of some warehouses and a public convenience.

The bookstall clerk, interrogated again, thought he remembered seeing a man in a soft felt hat and a burberry pass the bookstall with a bicycle at about 1.53 from the direction of the booking-hall, but had not paid much attention to him. Nobody else had noticed this person at all, as the Stranraer train was just due out again to Glasgow and there was a considerable number of passengers hurrying to catch it.

Two porters, who had seen the last of the luggage into the Glasgow train at 1.54, swore definitely that there was no bicycle in either of the vans.

Constable Ross hardly knew what to make of all this. The description of the bicycle coincided almost exactly with that of the machine taken from the Anwoth Hotel and, rather less closely, with that of Farren's bicycle. But how had it come to bear a Euston label? The bicycle put in at Girvan had been labelled for Ayr by the porter, and this point was verified by the guard who put it out at Ayr. It was quite impossible that it could have been re-labelled at Ayr, during the train's six minutes' wait at that station, for through-

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out that period one porter or another had been continually on duty beside the case containing labels, and all were prepared to swear that the bicycle had not passed through their hands.

The only possibility was that the bicycle had somehow been re-labelled after the Glasgow train had gone; but it was not labelled by a porter, for none of them remembered it.

What had become of the man in the grey suit?

If he was the same person as the man in the burberry who had been seen by the bookstall clerk wheeling a bicycle at 1.53, he must have put on the burberry somewhere outside (in the public convenience?) and returned via the booking-hall. What, then, had become of him? Had he hung about the station till 2.55? If so, where? He had not gone into the refreshment-room, for the girl there was positive that she had seen nobody of the sort. He had not been seen in the waiting-rooms or on the platform. Presumably he had left the bicycle by the hoarding and then gone out again, or taken some other train.

But which train?

He had not gone on to Glasgow by the 1.54, because it was quite certain that the bicycle could not have been re-labelled before the train left.

There remained the 1.56 to Muirkirk, the 2.12 and the 2.23 to Glasgow, the 2.30 to Dalmellington, the 2.35 to Kilmarnock and the 2.45 to Stranraer, besides, of course, the 2.25 itself.

Of these seven possibilities, Ross was able to eliminate the 1.56, the 2.30 and the 2.35. Nobody in the least corresponding to the description had travelled by any of them. The 2.45 to Stranraer he thought he could also dismiss. It had the advantage of bringing the murderer (if it was the

murderer) back on his tracks—and Ross bore in mind Wimsey's remark that the murderer would probably wish to reappear at home as soon and as plausibly as possible—but it seemed almost inconceivable that anybody should take the trouble to go all the way to Ayr to get rid of a bicycle which could have been dumped so much more readily and easily at some point nearer home.

There remained the two Glasgow trains and the 2.25. The 2.12 to Glasgow was a comparatively slow train, getting in at 3.30; the 2.23 was the Stranraer boat-train, getting in at 3.29. The former had the advantage of getting the traveller away from the station earlier. He made inquiries about both trains, and received, in each case, vague descriptions of men in burberries and grey suits. It depressed him that this style of dress should be so common. He played a little with the idea that the wanted man might have changed his clothes before leaving Ayr, but dismissed the idea. He could not have carried a second suit of clothes as well as a burberry in the little attaché-case, and he could hardly have gone out, bought a suit in the town and taken a room to change in. At least, he *could* have done so, but it would have been unnecessarily risky. In that case he would have had to go by a much later train, and the more time he wasted at Ayr, the more worthless his alibi would be. And if he had not wanted to establish an alibi, what was the meaning of the elaborate proceedings at the Minnoch? If, then, he had gone on to Glasgow, he could not have arrived there before 3.29 at the earliest, and in all probability would not have travelled later.

There remained the 2.55. He might have been the grey-suited traveller who had travelled to Euston. But if so, why take the bicycle with him, acknowledged or unacknowledged? He might just as well have left it on the platform at Ayr.

But no! Perhaps the best thing he could have done was to

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take it with him. He would know that it might be inquired for—as a stolen bicycle at least, if not as a piece of evidence in a murder plot. Euston was larger and farther from the site of the crime than Ayr. A bicycle could be lost very conveniently in London, and so long as he had not been seen to travel with it, he could deny all knowledge of it.

Constable Ross was not entirely satisfied with any of these explanations. It was perfectly possible that the man had not travelled by any train at all. He might still be walking about Ayr. He might have taken a car or a 'bus to anywhere. He felt that the thing was becoming too complicated to tackle single-handed. Accordingly he decided to return to Newton-Stewart with his report and get further instructions.

The first necessity was obviously to find out what had happened to the bicycle if and when it had got to London. Dalziel put an inquiry through to Euston. The reply came back in an hour's time. A bicycle answering to the description had duly arrived on the 5 a. m. train on Wednesday morning. As it had not been claimed, it had been placed in the left-luggage office to await its owner. It was a Raleigh corresponding to the description issued.

The police scratched their heads about this, and instructed the railway authorities to hold the machine until someone could come and identify it. In the meantime, if anybody called for it, he was to be detained. A call was put through to the London police requesting assistance in this part of the business, though it seemed likely that, if the bicycle was indeed the one which had been stolen, anybody who called for it would be foolish indeed.

"He couldna get it if he did call for 't," said Constable Ross. "They'd no gie 't up wi'oot a ticket."

"Wad they no?" said Sergeant Dalziel. "An' if the

fellow had got oot o' the train an' purchased a ticket at some other station? At Carlisle or Crewe or Rugby, maybe?"

"That's a fact," said Ross. "But had he done so, he'd have called for 't earlier. The later he leaves it the mair risky it wad be for him."

"Ay, we'll be thankful it isna away already," said Dalziel.

"Imph'm," said Ross, pleased with himself.

Inspector Macpherson was pleased, too. He had driven over early to Newton-Stewart to lay his time-table before Sergeant Dalziel, and he preened himself.

"It a' fits in fine wi' my theory," said he. "If yon's no Farren's bicycle, I'll eat my hat."

.

In the meantime, however, a shock was being prepared for Sergeant Dalziel. Full of pride in his own swift efficiency, he had, on his way back from Ayr the previous night, left a set of photographs at Girvan police-station, with instructions that they were to be shown to the porter McSkimming, as soon as he arrived in the morning, to see if he could identify the man in the grey suit. Now the Girvan police rang through to say that the porter had been carried off to hospital during the night, the "awfu' pain in his stomach" having suddenly developed into acute appendicitis. A call to the hospital brought the news that the man was being operated upon at that very moment, and would certainly be able to make no statement for some time. Disquieting details were added about "perforation," "threatenings of peritonitis" and "condition of the heart unsatisfactory." Dalziel swore, and instantly packed Ross off again with a second set of photographs to show to the station officials at Ayr.

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The next blow was directed at Inspector Macpherson, and caught him right on the midriff.

"If yon's no Farren's bicycle," he had said, "I will eat my hat."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the telephone bell rang.

"This is the Creetown police speaking," said a voice. "We've found yon bicycle o' Mr. Farren's lyin' abandoned in the hills by Falbae. There's nae doot it's his all right, for his name is written on a label tied to the handle-bars."

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It will be remembered that on the previous evening, the Inspector had dispatched a party to search the neighbourhood of certain disused lead-mines, the scene of an unfortunate disaster a year or two before. These mines consisted of half a dozen or more narrow shafts cut in the hill-granite a few miles east of Creetown. They were reached by following the road to a farm called Falbae. From there a sheep-track or two led to the mines, which were surface-workings only, from thirty to forty feet deep at most. Some of the supporting beams of the cages were still in position, though all the tackle had long since disappeared. The mines had a bad name, particularly since an unhappy girl had thrown herself down one of them, and nobody went near them, except an occasional shepherd. The people of the farm had little occasion to visit the place, and the road ended at the farm. Though the mines were comparatively close to civilisation, they were, for all practical purposes, as lonely and desolate as though they had been in the middle of a desert.

It was in this ill-omened spot that Farren's bicycle had been found. Macpherson, hastily driving over to investigate, found the Creetown policeman and a number of volunteer

assistants clustered round the head of one of the pits. A man was fitting a rope about his waist preparatory to descending.

The bicycle was lying where it had been found—a few hundred yards beyond the farm, and half a mile or so from the nearest pit. It was in good order, though the plated parts were slightly rusty from lying four nights among the bracken. There were no signs of accident or violence. It seemed simply to have been flung down and left when the track became too rough and steep for bicycling.

"Ye've no found the body?" said Macpherson.

No, they had found no body or clothing, but it seemed only too probable that the unfortunate Farren might be lying at the foot of one of the pits. They were intending—subject to instructions—to explore all the shafts in turn. It might be an awkward job, for one or two of them had water at the bottom. Macpherson told them to carry on and report the moment anything turned up. Then, deeply disappointed and chagrined, he made his mournful way back to Kirkcudbright.

To the Chief Constable fell the unpleasant task of telling Mrs. Farren about the fears they entertained about her husband. She was smiling when she met him at the door, and looked more cheerful than she had been for some days, and Sir Maxwell found it hard to enter upon his story. She took it well, on the whole. He laid stress on the fact that nothing as yet definitely pointed to suicide and that the search was only a matter of precaution.

"I quite understand," said Mrs. Farren, "and it is most good of you. You are very kind. I can't really believe that Hugh would do such a dreadful thing. I'm sure it's all a mistake. He is rather eccentric, you know, and I think it's much more likely that he has just wandered off somewhere. But of course you must search the mines. I quite see that."

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The Chief Constable made a few other inquiries, as tactfully as he could.

"Well, yes—if you know that already—I must admit that he was rather in a temper when he went away. Hugh is excitable, and he was upset by something that happened about the dinner. Oh, dear, no—nothing whatever to do with Mr. Campbell. What a ridiculous idea!"

Sir Maxwell felt he could not let this pass. He explained, as kindly as possible, that Farren had been heard to make some very unfortunate observations that same evening with reference to Mr. Campbell.

Mrs. Farren then admitted that her husband had, indeed, objected to Campbell's repeated visits to the house.

"But as soon as he came to think it over," she said, "he would realise that he was doing me an injustice. He would never go so far as to lay violent hands on himself—or on anybody else. Sir Maxwell, you *must* believe me. I *know* my husband. He is impulsive, but with him everything blows over very quickly. I am as certain as I stand here that he is alive and well, and that he has done nothing rash. Even if—even if you should find his dead body, nothing will persuade me but that he has met with an accident. Anything else is unthinkable—and before long you will come back and tell me that I am right."

She spoke with so much conviction that Jamieson was shaken in his belief. He said that he very much trusted that events would prove Mrs. Farren right, and took his leave. As he went, Strachan's car passed him at the turn of the lane, and glancing over his shoulder, he saw it stop at Mrs. Farren's door.

"Whatever it is about Farren," he said, "Strachan is in it, up to the hilt."

He hesitated for a moment, and then turned back. He

remembered that Macpherson had so far received no reply to his inquiry at Gatehouse about Strachan's whereabouts at 9.15 on Monday night.

"Oh, Mr. Strachan!" he said.

"Oh, good morning, Sir Maxwell."

"I just wanted to ask you something. I don't know if you've heard this—er—this rather disquieting news about Farren."

"No. What about him?"

Sir Maxwell explained about the discovery of the bicycle.

"Oh!" said Strachan. "Yes—h'm—well—that does look rather bad, doesn't it? Farren's a temperamental beggar, you know. I hope there's nothing in it. Does Mrs. Farren know?"

"Yes; I thought it better she should be prepared—just in case——"

"M'm. Is she upset?"

"No; she's being very brave. By the way, my people were trying to get hold of you yesterday evening."

"Were they? I'm so sorry. We'd all gone down to Sand Green and the girl had her night out. What did you want me for?"

"Just to ask if you happened to be at home on Monday night at a quarter past nine."

"Monday night? Let me see. No, I wasn't. No. I went up to fish at Tongland. Why?"

"Farren was seen going up the Laurieston Road, and we thought he might have been calling at your place."

"Not that I know of," said Strachan. "But I'll ask my wife. She'll know, or the girl will, if she doesn't. But they never said anything about it, so I don't think he can have called. Poor devil! I should never forgive myself if I thought that he was looking for me and that I might have prevented

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him from —— But we don't know yet that anything has happened to him."

"Of course not," said the Chief Constable. "We'll hope for the best, anyway."

He turned away homewards.

"Poker-faced man, that," he muttered to himself. "I don't trust him. But of course Farren may have nothing to do with all this. This extraordinary story of Wimsey's ——"

For Wimsey had, an hour or so earlier, given him a shock beside which all other shocks were a gentle tickling.

CHAPTER XV

BUNTER

THE SHOCK WAS A STAGGERER OF THE FIRST WATER, AND lost nothing of its force by being conveyed in terms of the most melancholy reproach. With bent head Wimsey bowed to the storm, and at the end had so little spirit left in him that he meekly allowed himself to be stripped of his grey flannel suit and sent to attend Campbell's funeral in a black morning-coat, top-hat and black kid gloves, to the consternation of his friends and the immense admiration of Mr. McWhan.

The trouble was this. On the Thursday morning, Bunter had asked for and received leave of absence in order to attend the cinema. Owing to Wimsey's having dinner with Inspector Macpherson at Newton-Stewart and then gone straight on to Bob Anderson's, he had not seen Bunter again until he returned between midnight and one o'clock in the morning after his visit to the police-station.

Then his first words were:

"Bunter! Something's going on at Mr. Gowan's house."

To which Bunter replied:

"I was about, my lord, to make a similar communication to your lordship."

"Somebody's just made a moonlight flitting," said Wimsey. "I've been round to tell the police. At least," he corrected himself, "not moonlight, because there is no moon; in fact, it's beastly dark and I fell over some confounded steps, but the principle is the same and have you got any arnica?"

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Bunter's reply was memorable:

"My lord, I have already taken upon me, in your lordship's absence, to acquaint Sir Maxwell Jamieson with Mr. Gowan's project of escape. I have every reason to anticipate that he will be detained at Dumfries or Carlisle. If your lordship will kindly remove your garments, I will apply suitable remedies to the contusions."

"For God's sake, Bunter," said Lord Peter, flinging himself into a chair, "explain yourself."

"When," said Bunter, "your lordship was good enough to acquaint me with the result of Inspector Macpherson's inquiry at Mr. Gowan's house, it came into my mind that possibly a greater amount of information might be elicited from Mr. Gowan's domestic staff by a gentleman's personal attendant than by an officer of the law. With this object in view, my lord, I desired permission to attend the cinematograph performance to-night. There is"—Bunter coughed slightly—"a young person employed in Mr. Gowan's household by the name of Elizabeth, from whom, in the course of a casual conversation yesterday, I obtained the information that she was to receive permission to spend this evening out. I invited her to attend the cinematograph entertainment in my company. The film was one which I had already seen in London, but to her it was a novelty and she accepted with apparent pleasure."

"No doubt," said Wimsey.

"During the course of the performance I contrived to render our relations somewhat more confidential."

"Bunter! Bunter!"

"Your lordship need be under no apprehension. In short, the young person confessed to me that she had some cause for dissatisfaction with her present situation. Mr. Gowan was kind, and Mrs. Alcock was kind and so was Mr. Alcock, but

during the last few days certain circumstances had arisen which had put her into a state of considerable trepidation. I naturally inquired what these circumstances might be. In reply she gave me to understand that her alarm was occasioned by the presence of a mysterious stranger in the house."

"You paralyse me!"

"Thank you, my lord. I pressed the young woman for further particulars, but she appeared apprehensive of being overheard in so public a place. I accordingly waited until the close of the performance, which took place at 10 o'clock, and invited her to take a stroll in the environs of the town.

"Not to trouble you with a long story, my lord, I succeeded at length in eliciting from her the following particulars. The mysterious occurrences of which she complained had commenced to eventuate on Monday last, on which day she had received permission to spend the evening with a sick relative. On returning to the house at half-past 10, she was informed that Mr. Gowan had been suddenly called away to London and had departed by the 8.45 train for Carlisle. She alleges that she would have thought nothing of this circumstance, had not the butler and the housekeeper taken such excessive pains to impress it upon her mind.

"The next day she was further surprised by being expressly forbidden by Mrs. Alcock to enter a certain corridor at the top of the house. This was a corridor leading to some disused rooms and one which, under ordinary circumstances, it would never have occurred to her to enter. Being, however, of the female sex, the prohibition immediately aroused in her a strong spirit of inquiry, and, on the first possible occasion, when she had reason to suppose the rest of the staff occupied downstairs, she went into the forbidden corridor and listened. She heard nothing, but to her alarm detected a faint odour of disinfectant—an odour which immediately

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connected itself in her mind with the idea of death. Which reminds me, my lord, to suggest that your lordship's injuries ——"

"Never mind my injuries. Carry on."

"The young woman, alarmed as she was, was still more frightened by hearing footsteps ascending the stairs. Not wishing to be caught in an act of disobedience, she hastened to conceal herself inside a small broom-cupboard at the head of the staircase. Peeping through the crack, she observed Alcock, carrying a jug of hot water and a safety-razor, pass along the corridor and enter a room at the end. Convinced that there was a corpse in the house, and that Alcock was on his way to wash and shave it in preparation for burial, she rushed downstairs and indulged in hysterics in the pantry. Fortunately Mrs. Alcock was not at hand, and in time she contrived to control her feelings and go about her duties in the accustomed manner.

"Immediately after lunch she was sent out upon an errand in the town, but she was afraid to communicate her suspicions to anybody. On returning, she was kept fully occupied by various tasks, and was never out of sight of one or the other of her fellow-domestics until bedtime. She spent the night in a condition of nervous apprehension, trying but failing to summon up courage to investigate the mysterious corridor again.

"Early in the morning she began to feel that even the most disagreeable certainty was preferable to agitating suspicions. She got up, crept cautiously past the bedroom of the two Alcocks and went up to the top of the house again. She ventured a little way down the corridor, when she was rooted to the spot by the sound of a hollow groan."

"Really, Bunter," said Wimsey, "your narrative style would do credit to the *Castle of Otranto*."

"Thank you, my lord. I am only acquainted by repute with the work you mention, but I understand that it enjoyed a considerable vogue in its day. The girl Elizabeth was hesitating whether to shriek or to run away, when she happened to tread upon a loose board, which made a loud noise. Thinking that the sound would awaken the Alcocks, she was preparing to retreat once more to the shelter of the broom-cupboard, when the door at the end of the passage was opened in a stealthy manner and a terrible face looked out at her."

Bunter appeared to be enjoying the sensation he was producing, and paused.

"A terrible face," said Wimsey. "Very well, I've got that. A terrible face. Next, please!"

"The face, as I understand," pursued Bunter, "was enveloped in grave-clothes. The jaws were closely bound up, the features were hideous and the lips writhed away from the protruding teeth and the apparition was of a ghastly pallor."

"Look here, Bunter," said Wimsey, "could you not cut out some of the fancy adjectives and say plainly what the face was like?"

"I had not myself the opportunity of observing the face," said Bunter, reprovingly, "but the impression produced on me by the young woman's observations was that of a dark-haired, clean-shaven man with protruding teeth under the affliction of some form of physical suffering."

"Oh, it was a man, then?"

"That was Elizabeth's opinion. A lock of hair was visible beneath the bandages. The eyes appeared to be shut, or partly shut, for, although she was standing in full view, the man said in a muffled tone, 'Is that you, Alcock?' She did not reply, and presently the apparition retired into the room

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and shut the door. She then heard a bell ring violently. She rushed down the passage in blind alarm, encountering Alcock as he issued from his bedroom. Too terrified to think what she was doing, she gasped out: 'Oh, what is it? What is it?' Alcock replied: 'It must be those dratted mice playing with the bell-wires. Go back to bed, Betty.' She then remembered that she deserved rebuke for having gone into the upstairs corridor and retired to her own room to hide her head in the bed-clothes."

"The best thing she could do," said Wimsey.

"Precisely, my lord. Thinking the matter over during the forenoon, she came to the very reasonable conclusion that the person she had seen might, after all, not be a living corpse but merely a sick man. She was, however, quite sure that she had never seen the person's face in her life. She now noticed that food was disappearing at every meal in excess of that consumed by herself and the Alcocks, and this she found encouraging, because, as she observed, dead folks do not eat."

"True," replied Wimsey. "As G. K. C. says, 'I'd rather be alive than not.'"

"Quite so, my lord. I spoke as encouragingly as possible to the young woman and offered to accompany her back to Mr. Gowan's house. She informed me, however, that she had received permission to spend the night at her mother's."

"Indeed?" said Wimsey.

"Precisely. I therefore took her home and returned to the High Street, where I observed Mr. Gowan's saloon car standing before the door. It was then five minutes to eleven. It was borne in upon me, my lord, that some person was about to take a surreptitious departure from Mr. Gowan's residence, and that Elizabeth had been given a night's leave of

absence in order that she might not be a witness of the proceedings."

"I think the inference is justifiable, Bunter."

"Yes, my lord. I took the liberty of concealing myself at the corner of the street contiguous to Mr. Gowan's house where the little flight of steps leads down to the river. Presently a tall figure, closely muffled in a scarf and overcoat with the hat pulled well down to conceal the features, emerged from the doorway. I could not see the features at all, but I am confident that the form was that of a male person. A few words were exchanged in a low tone with the chauffeur, and the impression produced upon my mind was that the speaker was Mr. Gowan himself."

"Gowan? Then who was the mysterious stranger?"

"I could not say, my lord. The car moved away, and, on consulting my watch, I found that the time was three minutes past eleven."

"H'm," said Wimsey.

"I formed the opinion, my lord, that Mr. Gowan had, after all, not departed from Kirkcudbright on the Monday evening as Alcock had stated, but that he had remained concealed in his own house in attendance upon the sick person observed by Elizabeth."

"Curiouser and curiouser," said Wimsey.

"I returned here," pursued Bunter, "and consulted the local time-table. I found that there was a train leaving Dumfries for Carlisle and the South at two minutes past midnight. It appeared conceivable that Mr. Gowan was intending to catch it either at Dumfries or at Castle-Douglas."

"Did you see any luggage taken out?"

"No, my lord; but it might have been previously placed in the car."

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"Of course it might. Did you inform the police?"

"I thought it best, my lord, in view of the delicacy of the circumstances, to communicate directly with Sir Maxwell Jamieson. I hastened to the Selkirk Arms and put in a call from there."

"You must have passed me," said Wimsey. "I had just hared across to the police-station, but Inspector Macpherson wasn't there."

"I regret extremely that I should have missed your lordship. I informed Sir Maxwell of the circumstances, and I understood him to say that he would immediately telephone to Castle-Douglas and Dumfries, with a view to intercepting Mr. Gowan if he should make his appearance at either of those points, and that he would also circulate a description of the car and its driver."

"Well, well, well," said Wimsey. "For a quiet country place, Kirkcudbright seems to boast a bright lot of inhabitants. They appear and disappear like Cheshire cats. I give it up. Bring forward the arnica and a whiskey-and-soda, and let's get to bed. All I know is, that it's perfectly useless for me to try and detect things. You're always off the mark before me."

The real sting of this episode lay in its tail. Inspector Macpherson came in next day after lunch in an irritable frame of mind. Not only had his rest been broken the previous night by an alarm of burglars at a house on the outskirts of the town, which turned out to be purely fictitious, not only had he thereby missed the scoop about Gowan, but the Chief Constable had bungled matters somehow. Though he had (or so he said) immediately telephoned descriptions of the car and its occupants to Castle-Douglas, Dumfries, Carlisle and all the intermediate stations up to Euston, noth-

ing whatever had been seen of any of them. Inquiries in the Stranraer direction had proved equally useless.

"It's fair rideeculous," said the Inspector. "It's pairfectly feasible that the car shuld ha' stopped on the outskirts of Castle-Douglas or Dumfries tae let Gowan tak' the train on his ain feet, but that they should ha' missed Gowan is no thinkable—and him so conspicuous wi' his big black beard an' a'."

Wimsey suddenly uttered a loud yelp.

"Oh, Inspector, Inspector! He's done it on us! What dolts and ninnies we are! And now I suppose that damned photograph has been circulated all over the country. Show Bunter the specimen, Inspector. I told you we ought to have done that before we did anything else. This will be the death of us. We shall never hold up our heads again. The specimen, Inspector, the specimen!"

"By God!" said the Inspector, "I believe your lordship's right. Tae think o' that, noo. An' me sae sairtain that it was Farren!"

He drew out his notebook and handed the bunch of curly black hair to Bunter.

"My lord," said the latter, reproachfully, "it is most regrettable that I did not see this before. Without presuming to speak as an expert, I may say that on several occasions I had the opportunity of examining the beard of a person belonging to the Mohammedan persuasion. You are doubtless aware, my lord, that the strict followers of this sect consider it unlawful to trim the hair of the face, with the consequence that the beard is extremely silky in texture, each hair preserving the natural tapering point."

Wimsey, without a word, handed Bunter his lens.

"Your lordship has doubtless observed," pursued Bunter, "that this specimen conforms in every particular to this

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description, and having seen Mr. Gowan's beard, I do not hesitate to give it as my personal opinion—subject to expert correction—that Mr. Gowan will now be found to be deprived, in whole or in part, of that facial adornment."

"I'm afraid you're right, Bunter," said Wimsey, sadly. "Now we know who the mysterious stranger was, and what he was suffering from. You'll have to revise your time-scheme, Inspector, and put Gowan in the leading rôle."

"I must go and send off a corrected description at once," said the Inspector.

"Just so," said Wimsey. "But have you the slightest idea what Gowan looks like without his beard? Inspector, I venture to prophesy that it will be a shock to you. When a man grows a jungle of face-fungus up to his cheek-bones and half-way down his chest, he had generally something to hide. I have known revelations ——" he sighed. "Do you realise, my dear man, that you have never seen *anything* of Gowan, except his eyes and a somewhat exaggerated nose?"

"We'll catch him by his nose," said the Inspector, without the slightest humorous intention. He bustled away.

"Bunter," said Wimsey, "this case resembles the plot of a Wilkie Collins novel, in which everything happens just too late to prevent the story from coming to a premature happy ending."

"Yes, my lord."

"The trouble about this, Bunter, is that it completely destroys our theory, and apparently lets out Farren."

"Quite so, my lord."

"And unless your friend Betty is lying, it lets out Gowan too."

"That appears to be the case, my lord."

"Because, if he was hiding at home all Monday night and Tuesday morning, suffering from an accident, he

couldn't have been painting pictures beyond Newton-Stewart."

"I quite see that, my lord."

"But is Betty telling the truth?"

"She appeared to me to be an honest young woman, my lord. But you will recollect that it was not until after lunch-time on the Tuesday that she saw Alcock enter the Blue-beard's Chamber, if I may use so fanciful an expression, and that the sick man was not seen by her in person until early on Wednesday morning."

"True," said Wimsey, thoughtfully. "We have no evidence that he was there on Tuesday at all. Alcock will have to be interrogated. And in my opinion, Alcock is a man of considerable resource and sagacity."

"Exactly so, my lord. And, what is more, Alcock has disappeared also."

CHAPTER XVI

CHIEF INSPECTOR PARKER

THE MYSTERY OF THE CAR TURNED OUT TO HAVE A PERFECTLY simple explanation. It was reported from a small hotel at Brig of Dee, a village a few miles out on the Kirkcudbright side of Castle-Douglas. A visit by the police discovered Messrs. Alcock and Hammond calmly seated at lunch. Their story was a straightforward one. Mr. Gowan had written from London, suggesting that, in his absence, they should take a holiday, and giving them his permission to use the car. They had decided on a little fishing excursion, and here they were. They had started late, on account of some small repairs which Hammond had had to make to the engine. The muffled-up person who had got in was Alcock himself. Certainly the Inspector could see Mr. Gowan's letter. Here it was, written from Mr. Gowan's club, the Mahlstick, on the club's own paper, and posted in London on the Wednesday.

As for Bunter's story, Alcock denied it altogether. The girl Betty was a foolish and hysterical young person, who imagined a great deal of nonsense. It was perfectly true that Mrs. Alcock had forbidden her to go into the disused part of the house. Betty was a great deal too fond of wasting her time. There were a lot of old magazines kept up there in a box-room, and the girl was always sneaking in there to read them when she ought to be engaged on household duties. Mrs. Alcock had had occasion to speak to her about it before. As regards the Tuesday, it was a fact that he (Alcock) had gone up there with hot water. One of the dogs

had been hurt in a rabbit snare. He had made it a bed in the disused room and washed the wounds out with disinfectant. Mrs. Alcock would show the dog to the police if they cared to call. As for the alleged apparition on Wednesday morning, it was quite obvious that the girl had merely been suffering from nightmare, due to her own ridiculous fancies about corpses. There was no sick person there and never had been. Mr. Gowan had left Kirkcudbright, as previously stated, by car on Monday evening to catch the 8.45. The person whom Bunter had seen entering the car on the Thursday night had been Alcock. Hammond and Mrs. Alcock could confirm all this.

They could, and did, confirm it. The injured dog was produced and found to be actually suffering from a nasty sore in the leg, and Betty, when closely questioned, admitted that she had frequently got into trouble through reading magazines in the box-room.

As against this, there was the evidence of a garage proprietor at Castle-Douglas that a gentleman, giving his name as Rogers, had telephoned the previous evening for a fast car to catch the 12.2 express at Dumfries. He had got ready a 14 h.p. Talbot, which was a new and speedy car, and at about twenty minutes past eleven, the gentleman had walked into the garage. He was tall and had dark eyes and what the proprietor described as a "rabbity" face. The proprietor had himself driven Mr. Rogers to Dumfries and set him down at the station at four minutes to twelve precisely.

The booking-clerk at Dumfries confirmed this up to a point. He remembered selling a first-class ticket for Euston to a gentleman who had come in just before midnight. He did not remember the gentleman very distinctly—he was much like other gentlemen, but he agreed that he had rather a big nose and stick-out teeth.

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The ticket-collector on the train was not helpful. Gentlemen on night-trains tended to be sleepy and muffled-up. Several first-class gentlemen had joined the 12.2 at Dumfries. Certainly he had seen nobody remotely resembling the photograph of Gowan. Was there anybody at all like what Gowan would be if clean-shaven? Well, there now, that was asking something, that was. Had the Inspector any idea what a 'edge-'og would look like without its spikes? No, nor he didn't suppose nobody had, neither. He was a ticket-collector, not a puzzle-picture expert. The booking-clerk at Dumfries expressed a similar opinion, still more forcibly.

Inspector Macpherson, whom this dreary investigation had carried as far as Euston, then turned his attention to the club from which Gowan was supposed to have written. Here the news was a little more cheering. Mr. Gowan had certainly not been staying there. One or two letters had arrived for him, which had been collected by a gentleman presenting Mr. Gowan's card. The gentleman had signed a receipt for them. Might the Inspector see the receipt? Certainly he might. The signature was J. Brown. The Inspector wondered how many J. Browns there might be among London's four million, and turned his weary steps towards Scotland Yard.

Here he asked for Chief Inspector Parker, who received him with more than official cordiality. Any friend of Wimsey's was entitled to Parker's best attention, and the complicated story of Gowan and the spanner, Farren, Strachan and the two bicycles, was sympathetically listened to.

"We'll find Gowan for you all right," said Parker, encouragingly. "With the very precise details you have produced for us it ought not to take long. What do you want done with him when we've got him?"

"Weel, noo, Mr. Parker," said the Inspector, deferen-

tially, "do ye think we have enough evidence tae arrest him?"

Parker turned this over carefully.

"I take it," he said, "that your idea is that Gowan met this man Campbell in the road between Gatehouse and Kirkcudbright and killed him in a quarrel. Then he got frightened and decided to fake up the accident. His first step was to cut off his own very conspicuous beard, in the hope, I suppose, of getting through the Gatehouse end of the business unrecognised. It must have been an awkward bit of barbering. Still, he might have managed to produce a fairly good imitation of a man who hadn't shaved for a fortnight. Then he went through all the movements which you originally ascribed to Farren. He hid the body up the side-lane and drove Campbell's own car back to Gatehouse. Now, why should he have done that?"

"There!" said the Inspector, "yon's the great deeficulty. Wherefore did he no tak' the corp back wi' him? It was verra weel understandable when we supposed that the murderer was Farren in Strachan's car, because we had the theory that he meant at first tae pit the blame on Strachan, but what for should Gowan du sic a fulish thing?"

"Well, let's see," said Parker. "He had to get Campbell's car back somehow. Ferguson might have noticed if the wrong car came in. But he didn't take the body with him on that journey, because, again, Ferguson or somebody might have spotted him with it. Gowan's car was a two-seater. Perhaps the dickey wasn't big enough to hide the corpse properly. He decides that it's better to risk leaving the corpse and his own car in the lane than to drive openly back to Gatehouse with a dead man upright in the seat beside him. Very well. Now he's got to get back to the scene of the crime. How? On foot?—No, this, I take it, is

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the point at which the bicycle was pinched from the what-d'ye-call-it hotel."

"Verra like," said the Inspector.

"You may have to alter your times a trifle here, but you've still got ample margin. You had 10.20 as the time for Campbell's car to arrive at Standing Stone Pool. Now then. Your man has still got to do the journey back on a bicycle. But he hasn't got to waste time going on foot to Strachan's house. So, if anything, he will get to the scene of the crime a trifle earlier than we supposed. He picks up his own car, puts the bike in the dickey—we've got to allow that—however, it would be pretty dark by that time and probably no one would notice. By the way, I see that this fellow Ferguson says that Campbell's car came in a little after 10 o'clock. Well, that fits your first time-table all right. It means that the murderer brought the car straight away in after the crime. But I see you've made an alteration here."

"Ay," said Macpherson. "We thocht he wad ha' lodged Campbell's car somewhere on the road an' transferred the body tae 't on his second journey. It wad be suspicious like for a second car tae come in tae Campbell's place."

"True; but if Ferguson is right about his times, that can't be the case. Is Ferguson an exact man?"

"Ay; they tell me he has a gran' memory for details."

"Then the murderer *must* have come in a second time with the body in his own car. It's odd that Ferguson shouldn't have heard the second car either come or go."

"Ay, that's a fact."

"The second car—when would it have got in? Between five and six miles on a push-bike—say half-an-hour. That brings it to 10.50. The bicycle put into the dickey and five or six miles back in a fast car—say fifteen minutes at the outside. That gives us 11.5 for the second time of arrival.

Ferguson says he went to bed shortly after 10. He must have been asleep, that's all. And still asleep when the car went out again—the murderer's car, I mean. No, that won't do. How and when did Gowan—if he was the murderer—get his car back to Kirkcudbright? He had to be on the spot in Gatehouse to look after the body and prepare his fake for the next morning. I suppose he *could* have driven his car home to Kirkcudbright during the small hours and then walked or push-cycled back to Gatehouse."

"Ay, there's nae doot he cud ha' done it. But it wadna be necessary. The chauffeur Hammond cud ha' driven him over again."

"So he could. That makes Hammond rather definitely an accomplice. But there's no reason why he shouldn't be. If Gowan committed the murder, all his servants, except possibly Betty, are obviously lying like Ananias, and one degree of guilt more or less makes no difference. Well, that explains that all right, and we've only got to suppose that Gowan carried out the rest of the scheme according to plan, changed over into the London train at Ayr and is now lurking in London till his beard's grown again. And that explains—what would otherwise seem rather odd—why, having faked the murder, he didn't disarm suspicion by showing himself openly in Kirkcudbright."

"Ay," said Macpherson, excitedly, "but dinna ye see it explains naething at a' ? It disna fit the description o' the man in the grey suit that tuk the bicycle tae Ayr. Nor it disna explain Betty's tale to Bunter, nor the muffled-up man escapin' fra' Gowan's hoose at deid o' nicht, nor the rabbity-faced fellow in the train fra' Castle-Douglas tae Euston. An' hoo aboot yon man that came knockin' on Campbell's door o' Monday midnight? "

Parker rubbed his jaw thoughtfully.

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"It's funny about the description of the man," he said. "Perhaps Gowan contrived to disguise himself in some way, with a false fair moustache, or something. And the girl's story may, as Alcock suggests, be partly imagination. Gowan may have returned to Kirkcudbright on Tuesday afternoon instead of going straight through to London, though I can't think why he should, and the letter sent from the Mahlstick certainly suggests that he was in London on the Wednesday. And the rabbit man may be somebody different altogether. And I'm inclined to think that the man who knocked at midnight *was* somebody different altogether."

"But," said the Inspector, "if that man gaed into the hoose and found Campbell dead and Gowan there, why hasna he come forward tae say so?"

"Possibly he was after no good," suggested Parker. "He may, as you previously remarked, have been a lady. Still, I admit that there are awkward gaps in the story. I think we'd better get on the tracks of Gowan and the rabbit man separately, and try to find out definitely which way Gowan really went. And when we do catch Gowan, I think perhaps we'd better not arrest him, but merely detain him on the ground that he can give information. After all, Inspector, we don't even know for an absolute certainty that it was he who met Campbell on the road. There may be other people with black beards."

"There's nae ither *artist* wi' a black beard like yon," said Macpherson, stubbornly. "Not in a' the district."

"Hell! yes," said Parker. "He's got to be an artist, of course. Well, anyhow, we'll detain Gowan."

Inspector Macpherson thanked him.

"And now there's this man Farren," went on Parker. "Do you want him too? Supposing he's not down a mine."

"I'm thinkin' he did ought tae be found," said the Inspector. "He was heard tae utter threats—an' forbye, he's disappeared, which in itself is distressin' tae his family an' friends."

"True. Well, we'll make inquiries for him as a lost, stolen or strayed. That will do no harm. But I daresay you've got him up your end somewhere. Who else is there? The Englishman—what's his name?—Waters. How about him?"

"I'd forgot Waters," replied Macpherson, frankly. "I canna see how he comes intae 't at a'."

"Nor do I," said Parker. "Well, we'll leave him out. And of course we're watching that bike at Euston to see if anybody's fool enough to come for it. And you'd better send somebody down to identify it, because it may not be the right one at all. Is that all? Suppose now we go and have a drink after all this talking? Oh, by the way, can you tell me what school Gowan went to? No? Oh, well, it doesn't matter. He's probably in the reference-books."

The Inspector still seemed a little unhappy.

"What is it?" said Parker.

"Ye havena——" he began. And then added, impulsively, "if we canna find somethin' sune, I'm thinkin' ye'll be hearin' officially fra' the Chief Constable."

"Oh!" said Parker. "But I don't see any need for that. You have lost no time, and you seem to me to be doing very well. We have to give you help at this end, of course—just as you would help me if one of my pet-lambs escaped to Scotland—but surely there's no call for us to take over the management of the case. It seems to be a matter in which the local man has all the advantages on his side."

"Ay," said the Inspector, "but it's an awfu' big job."

He sighed heavily.

CHAPTER XVII

LORD PETER WIMSEY

"STRACHAN!" SAID LORD PETER WIMSEY.

Mr. Strachan started so violently that he nearly pitched himself and his canvas into a rock-pool. He was perched rather uneasily on a lump of granite on the Carrick shore, and was industriously painting the Isles of Fleet. There was a strong wind and the menace of heavy storm, which together were producing some curious cloud effects over a rather fretful-looking sea.

"Oh, hullo, Wimsey!" he said. "How on earth did you get here?"

"Drove here," said Wimsey. "Fresh air and that kind of thing." He sat down on a convenient knob of rock, settled his hat more firmly on his head and pulled out a pipe, with the air of a man who has at last found an abiding-place.

Strachan frowned. He did not much care for spectators when he was painting, but Wimsey was working away in a leisurely manner with his tobacco-pouch, and appeared impervious to nods and winks.

"Very windy, isn't it?" said Strachan, when the silence had lasted some time.

"Very," said Wimsey.

"But it's not raining," pursued Strachan.

"Not yet," said Wimsey.

"Better than yesterday," said Strachan, and realised at once that he had said a foolish thing. Wimsey turned his head instantly and said brightly:

"Tons better. Really, you know, you'd think they'd turned on the water-works yesterday on purpose to spoil my sketching-party."

"Oh, well," said Strachan.

"Well, perhaps it was rather a wild idea," said Wimsey, "but it appealed to me rather. That's rather nice," he added, "how long have you been on that?"

"About an hour," said Strachan.

"You use very big brushes. Broad, sweepin' style and all that. Campbell used the knife a lot, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Is it quick work with a knife?"

"Yes, generally speaking, it is."

"Do you work as fast as Campbell?"

"I shouldn't work quite as fast as he would with a knife, if you mean that, because I should fumble it a bit, unless I had practice with it first. But using my own methods, I could probably produce a finished sketch nearly as fast as he could."

"I see. What do you call an ordinary time for a finished sketch?"

"Oh—well, what size of sketch?"

"About the size you're working on now."

"I shall have done everything I want to this in another half-hour—or perhaps a little bit longer. Provided the whole show doesn't carry away first," he added, as a fresh gust came drumming off the sea, making the easel vibrate and rock, in spite of the heavy stone slung between its legs.

"Oh, you're well ballasted. But I wonder you don't use a sketching-box on days like this."

"Yes; I don't know why I don't, except that I never have done and am not used to it. One gets into habits."

"I suppose one does."

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"I'm rather methodical, really," said Strachan. "I could lay my hands on any of my tools in the dark. Some people seem to like muddle, and all their stuff chucked into a satchel anyhow. I lay everything out before I begin—tubes of colour in the same order on my tray, dipper just here, spare brushes hung on there—even my palette is always made up in the same order, though not always with the same colours, of course. But, roughly speaking, it follows the order of the spectrum."

"I see," said Wimsey. "I'm not methodical myself, but I do admire method. My man, Bunter, is a marvel in that way. It is such a grief to him to find all kinds of odds and ends bulging my pockets or chucked helter-skelter into the collar-drawer."

"Oh, I'm terrible about drawers, too," said Strachan. "My tidiness begins and ends with my painting. It's just habit, as I said before. I haven't a tidy mind."

"Haven't you? Aren't you good at dates and figures and time-tables and all that sort of thing?"

"Not the least. Hopelessly unobservant. I haven't even got a good visual memory. Some people can come back from a place and make a picture of it with every house and tree in its place, but I have to see things before I can draw them. It's a drawback in a way."

"Oh, I could do that," said Wimsey. "If I could draw, I mean. F'r instance—take the road between Gatehouse and Kirkcudbright. I could make a plan of that, here and now, with every corner, every house, practically every tree and gate on the road marked. Or if you drove me along it blind-fold, I could recite to you exactly what we were passing at every moment."

"I couldn't do that," said Strachan. "I've been over it hundreds of times, of course, but I'm always seeing things

I hadn't noticed before. Of course I get the fun of having perpetual surprises."

"Yes; you're safeguarded against boredom. But sometimes an eye for detail is a good thing. If you want to tell a good, plausible, circumstantial lie, for example."

"Oh!" said Strachan. "Yes, I suppose it would be—under those circumstances."

"Your little story of the golf-ball on the links, for example," said Wimsey. "How much better it would have been if surrounded and supported by stout, upstanding, well-thought-out details. It wasn't a fearfully good lie to start with, of course, because it really left rather *too* much time unaccounted for. But since you stood committed to it, you should have made more of it."

"I don't know what you mean," said Strachan, stiffly. "If you doubt my word ——"

"Of course I doubt it. I don't believe it for a moment. Nor would anybody. For one thing, you didn't tell your wife the same story you told me. That was careless. If you're going to tell a lie, it should always be the same lie. Then you omitted to mention what hole you were playing when it happened. There never was a man telling a golfing story who didn't buttress it about with every kind of geographical and historical detail. That was poor psychology on your part. Thirdly, you said you were up at the golf-course all morning, quite forgetting that there might be plenty of witnesses to say you'd never been near the place, and that, as a matter of fact, you'd instructed Tom Clark to roll the greens that morning. He was on the ninth, as a matter of fact, between 10 and 11 o'clock, and can swear that you didn't come in, and if you'd gone up later, you'd hardly have called it 'after breakfast.' Besides ——"

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"Look here," said Strachan, with a lowering brow, "what the devil do you mean by talking to me like this?"

"I'm just wondering," said Wimsey, "whether you cared to suggest any other explanation for that black eye of yours. I mean, if you liked to give it to me now, and it happened to be—well, say, anything in the nature of a domestic fracas, or anything, I—er—I might not need to pass it on, you see."

"I don't see at all," said Strachan. "I think it's damned impertinence."

"Don't say that," pleaded Wimsey. "Look here, old man, your midnight revels are nothing to me. If you were out on the tiles, or anything ——"

"If you take that tone to me, I'll break your neck."

"For God's sake," cried Wimsey, "don't use any *more* threats."

Strachan looked at him, and slowly flushed a deep crimson from brow to throat.

"Are you accusing me," he demanded, thickly, "of having anything to do with murdering Campbell?"

"I'm not accusing anybody," said Wimsey, lightly, "of murdering him—yet." He suddenly scrambled to his feet, and stood poised on the rock, looking out away from Strachan over the sea. The clouds had blown together into one threatening mass, and the waves were lipping along cold and yellow, showing snarling little teeth of foam. "But I do accuse you," he said, turning suddenly and leaning back against the wind to keep his balance, "I do accuse you of knowing a good deal more about it than you have told the police. Wait! Don't be violent. You fool! *It's dangerous to be violent.*"

He caught Strachan's wrist as the blow glanced past his ear.

"Listen, Strachan, listen, man. I know I look tempting,

standing here like this. Damn it, that's what I did it for. I'm a smaller man than you are, but I could chuck you into eternity with a turn of the wrist. Stand still. That's better. Don't you *ever* think two minutes ahead? Do you really suppose you can settle everything by brute force in this blundering way? Suppose you *had* knocked me down. Suppose I had split my head open, like Campbell. What would you have done then? Would you be better off, or worse off? What would you have done with the body, Strachan?"

The painter looked at him, and put the back of his hand up against his forehead with a sort of desperation in the gesture.

"My God, Wimsey," he said, "you deadly devil!" He stepped back and sat down on his camp-stool, shaking. "I meant to kill you then. I've got such a hell of a temper. What made you do that?"

"I wanted to see what sort of a temper you had got," said Wimsey, coolly. "And you know," he added, "as a matter of fact, if you had killed me, you would have run very little risk. You had only to go away and leave me, hadn't you? My car would have been here. Everybody would have thought I'd just been blown off my feet and cracked my skull—like Campbell. What evidence would there have been against you?"

"None, I suppose," said Strachan.

"You think that?" said Wimsey. "Do you know, Strachan, I almost wish I had let you knock me over—just to see what you would do. Well, never mind. It's starting to rain. We'd better pack up and go home."

"Yes," said the other. He was still very white, but he started meekly to put his painting materials together. Wimsey noticed that, in spite of his obvious agitation, he worked swiftly and neatly, evidently following out some habitual

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order of working. He secured the wet canvas in a carrier, mechanically putting in the canvas-pins and pulling the straps tightly, transferred the brushes to a tin case and the palette to a box and then collected the tubes of paint from the ledge of the easel.

"Hullo!" he said, suddenly.

"What's up?" said Wimsey.

"The cobalt's not here," said Strachan, dully, "it must have rolled off."

Wimsey stooped.

"Here it is," he said, extracting it from a clump of heather. "Is that the lot?"

"That's the lot," said Strachan. He laid the tubes in their box, folded up and strapped the easel and stood, as though waiting for orders.

"Then we'd better make tracks," said Wimsey, turning up his coat-collar, for the rain had started to come down heavily.

"Look here," said Strachan, still motionless in the down-pour, "what are you going to do?"

"Go home," said Wimsey. "Unless"—he looked hard at Strachan—"unless there's anything you want to tell me."

"I'll tell you this," said Strachan. "One of these days you'll go too far, and somebody *will* murder you."

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised," said Lord Peter, pleasantly.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. SMITH-LEMESURIER

ALL THIS TIME THERE WAS A GENTLEMAN WHO WAS feeling rather hurt and neglected, and that was the young constable who had so signally failed in interviewing Mr. Jock Graham. This young man, whose name was Duncan, was keen about his profession, and he was acutely aware that he was not being given a proper chance. Graham had laughed at him; Sergeant Dalziel, importantly rushing about after bicycles and railway-tickets, had callously ignored his suggestions and left him to deal with drunks and motoring offences. Nobody took P. C. Duncan into his confidence. No matter. P. C. Duncan would pursue a line of his own. Perhaps, when he had shown them what he could do, they would be sorry.

There was no doubt at all in Duncan's mind that Jock Graham's movements required investigating. There were rumours. Hints were dropped in bars. Fishermen had been seen to nudge one another and fall suddenly silent when Graham's name was mentioned. Unfortunately, it is hardly possible for a local policeman in a country place to snoop about, wheedling information out of the inhabitants after the manner of Sherlock Holmes. His features are known. He is a marked man. Duncan played a little with the idea of getting himself up (when off duty) as an aged clergyman or a Breton onion-seller, but a glance in the mirror at his stalwart frame and round, ruddy cheeks was enough to rob him of his self-confidence. He envied the Scotland Yard detective, who, lost among a multitudinous population and

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backed by a powerful force, can go about, impenetrable and unknown, hobnobbing with thieves in the East End or with dukes and millionaires in Mayfair night-clubs. Alas! in Creetown and Newton-Stewart he had only to poke his nose round the door to be known and avoided.

He made persistent inquiries, cajoling and even threatening one or two people who appeared to know more than they should. Unhappily, the Scottish peasant has a remarkable talent for silence when he likes and, unhappily also, Jock Graham was a popular man. After several days of this kind of thing, Duncan did, however, contrive to unearth one piece of definite information. A farmer who was passing along in a cart towards Bargrennan at 11.30 on the Tuesday morning, had seen a man walking along the farther side of the Cree as though coming from the scene of the crime. The man had immediately ducked down as though to escape observation, but not before the farmer had definitely recognised him as Graham. But further than this, Duncan succeeded only in hearing and raising rumours. A journalist on the *Glasgow Clarion*, to whom he had rather rashly said more than he ought, came out with an unfortunate article, and P. C. Duncan received a severe rebuke from his harassed superiors.

"An' if Graham was as guilty as sin," said Sergeant Dalziel angrily—this occurred on the same day that the porter at Girvan developed appendicitis, and the Sergeant was quite ready to take it out of somebody—"what for wad ye be tellin' him that he's suspectit, an' givin' him the chance to make up an alibi? Wull ye look at this, noo?" He flapped the *Clarion* before Duncan's unhappy eyes. "'Reason tae suppose that the crime was committit by an airtist.' Isna yon precisely the fact that we was wishfu' tae conceal frae the suspekks? 'Weel-known airtist interviewed

by oor correspondent.' Whae tell't ye tae send yon fellie speirin' round at Graham's place? If ye canna lairn discretion, Charlie Duncan, ye wad du better tae fin' some ither profession."

However, this indiscretion had its consequences. On the Saturday morning, Sergeant Dalziel was seated in his office when a lady was ushered in, demurely dressed in a black costume and close-fitting hat. She smiled nervously at the Sergeant, and murmured that she desired to make a statement in connection with Campbell's murder.

Dalziel knew the lady well enough. She was Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier, an "in-comer" of some three years' standing in Newton-Stewart, and giving herself out to be the widow of an African civil servant. She lived, simply and inexpensively, in a small converted cottage, with a French maid. Her manner was plaintive and artless, her age rather more than it appeared, and young men who knew no better were apt to see in her a refreshing revelation of an unfashionable womanliness. Why she should have chosen to settle in this out-of-the-way spot was never explained. Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier herself was accustomed to say that the rents in Scotland were so low, and that she had to do the best she could with her poor little income. It did not matter where she lived, she would add, sadly; since her husband's death she was all alone in the world. Lord Peter Wimsey had been introduced to her the previous year at a small sale of work which was being held in connection with the Episcopalian Church. He had afterwards expressed the coarse opinion that the lady was "out for blood." This was ungrateful, since Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier had devoted herself to him very charmingly throughout what must have been to him a tedious afternoon, and had sold him a green silk sachet with "Pyjamas" embroidered upon it with her own hands. "I

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can't give money," said Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier, smiling shyly up at him, for she was a dainty little person, "but I can give my work, and it's the intention that counts, isn't it?"

Sergeant Dalziel placed a chair for his visitor, and softened his rugged tones as he inquired what he could do for her.

Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier hunted in her vanity-bag for some time, and eventually produced the cutting from the *Glasgow Clarion* which had brought P. C. Duncan so much trouble and reproof.

"I just wanted to ask," she said, raising her speedwell-blue eyes pleadingly to the policeman's face, "whether there is any foundation for—for the dreadful insinuations in this."

Sergeant Dalziel read the paragraph through as carefully as though he had never seen it before, and replied cautiously:

"Ay, imph'm. That's as may be."

"You see," said Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier, "it says that the m-m-murder must have been committed by an artist. What makes them say that?"

"Weel," said the Sergeant, "I'll no be sayin' that there mightna be some evidence tae point in that direction."

"Oh!" said the lady. "I hoped—I thought—I fancied perhaps this reporter was making it all up out of his own head. They are such terrible people, you know. Did he really get that idea from—from the police?"

"I couldna verra weel say," replied the Sergeant. "He'll maybe ha' caught it fra' some ither irresponsible pairson."

"But the police do think that?" she insisted.

"I'll no be sayin' so," said Sergeant Dalziel, "but seein' as the deceased was an airtist himsel' and that the most of his friends was airtists, there is always the possibeelity."

Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier fumbled with a clasp of her bag.

"And then," she said, "it goes on to mention Mr. Graham."

"Ay, it does so," said the Sergeant.

"Surely, surely"—the blue eyes again sought the Sergeant's—"it can't be that you—that you actually suspect Mr. Graham of this dreadful thing?"

Sergeant Dalziel cleared his throat.

"Och, weel noo," said he, "there is always some groonds for suspecion when a crime is committed an' a pairson willna state juist whaur he was at the time. I wadna say that there was what they ca' a violent presumption of guilt, but there's groonds for what we may ca' a general suspecion."

"I see. Tell me, officer—supposing—supposing anybody were to clear your mind of this—general suspicion against Mr. Graham—it wouldn't be necessary to—to—to make the explanation public?"

"That depends," said Dalziel, eyeing his visitor rather more closely, "on the nature of the explanation. If it was such as tae remove a' possibeelity of this gentleman's bein' consairned, an' if it was weel supportit by proofs, an' provided that the maitter never cam' tae trial, there wad be nae need tae mak' onything public at a'."

"Ah! then, in that case—oh, Mr. Dalziel, I can rely on your discretion, can't I? It's such a dreadful thing to have to tell you—just consider—but I'm sure you will understand—in my sad, lonely position—I—oh! I don't know how to say it."

Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier dragged out a wispy handkerchief and temporarily veiled the light of the speedwell eyes.

"Come, noo," said the Sergeant, gently, "there's no call tae fash yoursel'. We hear an awfu' lot o' things, in oor

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profession, that we niver think twice on. Forbye," he added, helpfully, "I'm a mairrit man."

"I don't know that that doesn't make it worse," bleated Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier. "But I'm sure," she added, peeping hopefully up over the edge of the handkerchief, "you're a kind, understanding man, and wouldn't make it worse for me than you could help."

"Deed, no," said the Sergeant. "Dinna fash yersel', Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier. Juist tell me a' about it, as if I might be your feyther."

"I will, thank you, I will. Mr. Graham would never say anything, of course, he's too kind and too chivalrous. Mr. Dalziel—he couldn't tell you where he was on Monday night—because—he was—with me."

Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier paused with a little gasp. Sergeant Dalziel, for whom this revelation held by this time no element of surprise, nodded paternally.

"Ay, imph'm, is that so? That's a verra guid reason for him tae keep silence, a verra satisfactory reason indeed. Can ye tell me, Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier, at whit time Mr. Graham came tae your hoose and left ye again?"

The lady squeezed the filmy handkerchief between her small, plump hands.

"He came to dinner, at about 8 o'clock. And he left me again after breakfast. That would be a little after 9."

The Sergeant made a note on a slip of paper.

"And did naebody see him come or gae?"

"No. We were—very careful."

"Ay. How did he come?"

"I think he said a friend had given him a lift into Newton-Stewart."

"Whit friend wad that be?"

"I don't know—he didn't say. Oh, Mr. Dalziel, shall you

have to find out? My maid can tell you when he arrived. Is it necessary to bring this other person into it? ”

“ Maybe no,” said the Sergeant. “ An’ he went aff again after 9 o’clock? Your maid can witness that tu, I’m thinkin’.”

“ Yes, of course.”

“ An’ he was in the hoose a’ the time? ”

“ He—he was never out of my sight,” moaned Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier, again overcome by the painfulness of this confession.

The Sergeant looked at her shaking shoulders and hardened his heart.

“ An’ whit makes ye think, ma’am, that this story provides Mr. Graham wi’ an alibi for the murder o’ Campbell, that was fund wi’ his heid dunted in at 2 o’clock o’ Tuesday afternoon? ”

Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier gave a little shriek.

“ Oh!” She stared at him wildly. “ I didn’t know. I thought—look at that horrid newspaper. It said Mr. Graham refused to state where he was the previous night. I don’t understand. I imagined—oh! don’t, don’t say it doesn’t clear him after all! ”

“ I’ll no gae sae far as tae say that,” said the Sergeant, “ but ye’ll see for yersel’ that it disna cover a’ the groond. Mr. Graham was twa days missin’. Ye dinna ken whaur he went after he left your hoose? ”

“ No—no—I’ve no idea. Oh, my God! Why did I ever come here? I made so certain that it was an alibi for the Monday night you wanted.”

“ Weel, that’s a’ tae the guid,” said the Sergeant, comfortingly. “ It’s verra like, when he kens that the Monday nicht is accountit for, he’ll tell us aboot the ither maitter. Noo, I’ll juist rin ye back tae your hoose in my car and get a wee word fra’ your maid, by way o’ corroboration. Dry

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your eyes, ma'am. I'll no say a word mair than is necessary. It's verra courageous of ye tae ha' come tae me wi' your story, an' ye can coont upon ma' discretion."

The maid's story agreed word for word with that of the mistress—as, indeed, the Sergeant had expected it would. He did not care for the woman—a sly foreign creature, he thought her—but he could not shake her on any essential point.

The whole episode was disquieting. No sooner had that infernal paragraph appeared in the paper than he had expected an alibi to be produced. He had said as much to the unhappy Duncan. But why this particular alibi? The woman's story was not improbable in itself, given Jock Graham and given Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier, only—why the alibi for the Monday night only? He read the newspaper cutting again. "—Mr. J. Graham, the distinguished artist, who laughingly refused to state where he had been between Monday night and Wednesday morning." No; nobody could have deduced from that that Monday night was the crucial period. Wimsey must have been talking. God knew what he had been blurting out in the course of his unofficial inquiries. If it was not Wimsey——

If it was not Wimsey, then nothing but guilty knowledge could possibly account for that alibi, so neatly covering the time of Campbell's death. And if Jock Graham had guilty knowledge, then what became of the beautiful theory about Farren, and the hopeful imbroglio about the bicycle?

The Sergeant groaned aloud. He might have groaned still more deeply if he had known that Inspector Macpherson and Chief Inspector Parker of Scotland Yard were at that very moment engaged in destroying the beautiful Farren theory in favour of a Gowan theory.

His eye fell upon an object lying on his desk. It was a

grey felt hat—the sole treasure-trove that the search-party had so far brought back from Falbae. It was not Farren's. Mrs. Farren and Jeanie had both repudiated it. It bore no name. It was just another puzzle. He turned it about in his hands discontentedly.

The telephone rang. Sergeant Dalziel lifted the receiver. The speaker was the police-superintendent at Glasgow.

"We've got a man here who says he is Mr. Waters of Kirkcudbright. Are you still wanting him? He was just boarding the Dumfries train."

"Whit account does he gie o' himsel'?"

"Says he's just off a yachting expedition. He made no attempt to deny his identity. What shall we do with him?"

"Detain him," said Sergeant Dalziel, desperately. "I'll be along on the next train."

"I'll tak' nae mair chances," he added to himself, as he hurriedly prepared for his journey. "I'll detain the whole bluidy lot o' them."

CHAPTER XIX

WATERS' STORY

TO HIS GREAT SURPRISE, THE SERGEANT FOUND WIMSEY AT the Glasgow police-station before him. He was waiting placidly in the Superintendent's office, with his hands clasped over his walking-stick and his chin on his hands, and he greeted the Sergeant with exasperating cheerfulness.

"Hullo—ullo—ullo!" he said. "So here we are again."

"An' hoo did yew get here?" snapped Dalziel, his Gallo-way accent very pronounced and sharpening his u's almost to the point of menace.

"In a rather roundabout way," said Wimsey, "but, generally speaking, by train. I spent last night in Campbell's cottage. Arrived in Glasgow by the 2.16 to see Picture Exhibition. Distressed fellow-countryman wires to Kirkcudbright that he is in the hands of the children of Amalek and will I come and disentangle him. Faithful valet sends wire on to Picture Exhibition. Intelligent attendant at Exhibition identifies me and delivers wire. Like a mother-eagle I fly to the place where distressed fellow-countryman, like wounded eaglet, bleeds, metaphorically speaking. You know my friend, Superintendent Robertson?"

"Oh, yes," said the Superintendent, "Sergeant Dalziel has been over about this matter before. Well, now, Sergeant, you'd probably like to see this man Waters straight away. He's told his story to us, but you had best hear it from himself. Forbes, just bring Waters in here again."

After a few moments the door opened, to admit an exceedingly dishevelled and exceedingly angry Waters, dressed

in a grubby waterproof and very grubby sweater and flannel trousers. His untidy hair was pushed up into a dissipated-looking comb by a linen bandage which half covered one eye, and gave him a rake-helly and piratical appearance.

"Good Lord, man!" exclaimed Wimsey, "what the devil have you been doing to yourself?"

"Doing to myself?" retorted Waters. "What the devil have all you people been doing? What's all this damned fuss about? What's all this tripe about Campbell? What in thunder do these damned idiots mean by arresting me? What the hell has it all got to do with me, anyhow?"

"My dear man," said Wimsey, breaking in before the Sergeant could speak, "your eloquence is extremely impressive, but not more so than your appearance, which is, if I may say so, picturesque in the extreme. Your absence from your usual haunts has been causing acute distress to your friends—a distress and anxiety which the manner of your return is doing nothing to allay. Before embarking on any discussion about Campbell or any other extraneous subject, will you so far relieve the agony of mind of a sympathising compatriot as to say where you have been, why you have not written and why you appear to have been indulging in a free fight, with extensive damage to your handsome façade?"

"I never knew such a lot of silly fuss about nothing," grumbled Waters. "I've been yachting with a bloke, that's all—old Tom Drewitt of Trinity, as a matter of fact. We were running up the west coast, and he was going to put me off at Gourock on Thursday, only we fell in with a bit of bad weather and had to run across and hang round the Irish coast for a couple of days while it blew itself out. I don't know if you fancy hugging a lee shore full of rocks in a sou'westerly gale. All I can say is, we didn't. I daresay I

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am a bit untidy—so'd you be, after five days in Tom's dirty little wind-jamming beast of a boat. I've no skin left on my hands, and it's not the fault of that young lout of Tom's that I'm still alive. He got the wind up—Tom ought to have stuck to the tiller himself. Boom came across and nearly cracked my head open. Tom wanted me to go on with him this morning up to Skye, but I wasn't having any. I told him he could damn well put me off at Gourrock and if ever I sailed with him again it would be when that cub of his was drowned and out of harm's way."

"See here, noo," put in Sergeant Dalziel. "Let's get a' this story correct. Ye say ye started oot wi' this man Drewitt on his yacht. When did ye go aboard, sir?"

"Look here, why all this?" said Waters, appealing to Wimsey.

"Better tell him what he wants to know," said Wimsey. "I'll explain later."

"Oh, all right, if you say so. Well, I'll tell you exactly what happened. Last Monday night I was in bed and asleep, when I heard some fool chucking stones at my window. I went down, and there was Drewitt. You remember Drewitt, Wimsey? Or was he before your time?"

"I never knew any Trinity men," said Wimsey. "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."

"Of course, you were at Balliol. Well, it doesn't matter. Anyway, I let Drewitt in and gave him a drink. It was about 11 o'clock at night, I think, and I was rather fed-up at being roused out, because I meant to go up to Glasgow by the 8.45, and I wanted my beauty-sleep. Besides, I felt rather bloody. You remember, Wimsey—I'd had that scrimmage with Campbell at the McClellan Arms. By the way, what is this story about Campbell?"

"Tell you later, old man. Carry on."

"Well, I told Drewitt I was going to Glasgow, and he said he'd got a better idea than that. Why not come with him? He was running up that way, and if I wasn't in a hurry I might just as well join him and do a bit of fishing and get the sea-air. It was lovely weather and his boat, *Susannah*, he calls her, could make the voyage in two or three days, or we could muck about a bit longer if we wanted to, and if the wind didn't hold, we could fall back on the auxiliary motor. Well, it sounded all right, and it didn't matter to me when I got to Glasgow, so I said I'd think about it. So then he said wouldn't I go with him anyhow and have a look at the *Susannah*. He'd got her lying off the Doon."

"That's right," said Wimsey to Dalziel. "There was a boat there on Monday night, and she went off Tuesday morning."

"You seem to know all about it," said Waters. "Well, I thought I might as well have the run. It seemed the best way of getting Drewitt out of the house, so I put on a coat and went up with him. He'd hired a car from somewhere or other and he ran me along. He wanted me to go aboard and meet his whelp, but I didn't want to do that. I hadn't made up my mind, you see. So he brought me back again and dropped me at the corner of the road where it turns off to Brogue. He'd have come all the way, only I wouldn't let him, because I knew I'd have to ask him in again and give him another drink, and I'd had quite as much as I wanted already. So I walked back into Kirkcudbright, and left it with him that I'd think it over, and if I wasn't on board at half-past 9, he wasn't to wait any longer, because I shouldn't be coming and he'd miss the tide."

"Well, I didn't really intend to go, but I turned in and had a good sleep and next morning when Mrs. McLeod called me, the weather looked damn good, and I thought

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why not, after all? So I had my breakfast and got my bike out and pushed off."

"Ye didna tell Mrs. McLeod whaur ye were gaein'."

"No, there wasn't any need. She knew I was going to Glasgow and might be away some days, and it was no concern of hers how I went. As a matter of fact she was out at the back somewhere, and I didn't see her. I bicycled up to the Doon, signalled to Drewitt and he took me off."

"What did you do with your bicycle?" asked Wimsey.

"I just shoved it into a little shed-place there is up there, among the trees. I'd often put it there before when I was painting or bathing off the Doon, and it never came to any harm. Well, that was that. As I was saying, we had rather bad luck with the weather and one thing and another, and we didn't get to Gourock till this morning."

"Did ye no touch anywhere?"

"Yes—I can give you the itinerary if you want it. We dropped down the estuary with the morning tide, passing the Ross Light some time before 10. Then we held on across Wigtown Bay, passing Barrow Head fairly close in. We had a good southeasterly breeze and made the Mull about tea-time. Then we followed the coast northwards, passing Port Patrick at about 7 o'clock, and anchored for the night in Lady Bay, just outside Loch Ryan. I can't give you more details than that, as I'm no yachtsman. That was Tuesday. On Wednesday we lazed about and did a bit of fishing, and then, about lunch-time, the wind started to haul round to the southwest and Drewitt said he thought we'd better run across to Larne instead of carrying on up to Gourock as we intended. We put in at Larne for the night and took some beer and stuff aboard. On Thursday it was fine enough, but blowing rather a lot, so we sailed up to Ballycastle. It was a bally place, too. I began to think I was wasting my time. I

was sick, too. Friday was a foul beast of a day, raining like hell and blowing. However, Tom Drewitt seemed to think it was the kind of day he liked to be out in. Said he didn't care how it blew, provided he had plenty of sea-room or words to that effect. We staggered across to Arran, and I was sick all the time. That was the day I got this crack on the head, curse it. I made Tom put in somewhere under the lee of the island, and in the night the wind dropped, thank God! This morning we got up to Gourrock and I shook the dust of the beastly boat off my feet. No more sailing-boats for me, thank you. For complete boredom and physical misery, commend me to a small sailing-vessel in a gale of wind. Have you ever tried cooking fish on a dirty little oil-stove, with your knees above your head? Oh, well, perhaps you enjoy that sort of thing. I don't. Nothing but fish and corned beef for four days—that's not my idea of amusement. Go on up the coast, indeed! Not on your sweet life, I told him. I got off that damned old wherry as quick as I bloody well could, and went on by train to Glasgow and got a hot bath and a shave, and my God! I needed them. And I was just starting off to catch the 5.20 to Dumfries, when these police imbeciles came along and collared me. And now, *do* you mind telling me what it's all about?"

"Did ye no see a newspaper all those four days?"

"We saw a *Daily Mail* at Larne on Thursday morning and I got an *Express* in Glasgow this afternoon, but I can't say I read them very carefully; why?"

"The story tallies all right, what?" said Wimsey, nodding to the Sergeant.

"Ay, imph'm. It tallies well enough, only for the evidence of this man Drewitt."

"He'll have to be found, of course," said the Glasgow Superintendent. "Where will he be just now, Mr. Waters?"

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" Oh, God knows! " said Waters, wearily. " Somewhere off Kintyre, I should imagine. Don't you believe what I'm telling you? "

" Of course; why not? " said the Superintendent. " But, you see, sir, it's our duty to obtain corroboration of your statement if possible. Did Mr. Drewitt carry a wireless set on board? "

" Wireless set? The filthy canoe hadn't so much as a spare frying-pan," said Waters, crossly. " Do you mind telling me what I'm accused of? "

" Ye're no accused of onything at all," said the Sergeant. " If I'd been accusin' ye of onything," he added, cannily, " I would ha' warned ye that ye'd no need tae be answerin' my questions."

" Wimsey, I can't make head or tail of all this. For God's sake, what is all this mystery? "

" Well," said Wimsey, consulting the Superintendent by a look, and receiving a nodded permission to speak, " you see, it's like this, old horse. Last Tuesday morning they found Campbell lying dead in the Minnoch with a nasty crack in his head, made with a blunt instrument. And as you had last been seen with your ten fingers on his throat, threatening to do him in, we rather wondered, you know, what had become of you and all that."

" My God! " said Waters.

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" Noo, that," remarked Sergeant Dalziel to Wimsey, some time later, when Waters had retired to write agitated letters and telegrams addressed to the *Susannah* at various possible and impossible ports, " that is a verra inconvenient piece of evidence. Naiturally, we'll be findin' this felly Drewitt, an' naiturally the baith o' them will be in the same story

tegether. But even supposin' Waters went on board at the Doon as he said—an' whae's tae tell that?—he may ha' bin pit ashore again at any point."

"Wait a minute," said Wimsey. "How about the body? He couldn't very well have taken that on board with him."

"Ay, that's so. That's verra true. But supposin' Drewitt runs him up in the night tae the Minnoch ——"

"No," said Wimsey. "You're forgetting. The man who threw stones at the window may have been Campbell or he may have been Drewitt. He can't have been both. And somebody came back to Waters' bedroom that night and ate his breakfast in the morning. He can't have been Campbell, and it's extremely unlikely that it was Drewitt, so it must have been Waters. He couldn't have got up to the Minnoch and back again in the time."

"But Drewitt might ha' cairrit the corpse away for him."

"That depends. He'd have had to know the country pretty well to find the right place in the dark. And when was all this planned? If the man at the window was Campbell, how did Waters get into communication with Drewitt? If Drewitt was the man at the window, when and where was Campbell murdered? Hang it all, Sergeant, you can't have it both ways. If Waters went on board when he said he did, he's got his alibi. Otherwise, I freely admit that there may be a flaw in the thing. It's perfectly possible that the *Susannah* may have picked him up at some point or other on the Tuesday night. Suppose, for example, that Waters knew beforehand that the boat would be at Lady Bay that night. He could have hired a car somewhere and picked the *Susannah* up there, and the rest of the tale could have been concocted between them. The point you've got to prove is that Waters went aboard the *Susannah* on the Tuesday morning. There

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are cottages down at the Doon. Surely to goodness somebody must have seen him."

"That's a fact," said the Sergeant.

"And the bicycle should be there, too."

"Aweel," said Dalziel, resignedly, "I can see there'll be no kirk for me the morn. It's awfu', the wark there is in a case the like o' this. An' there's no train back tae Newton-Stewart the nicht."

"No more there is," said Wimsey. "Life's just one damn thing after another."

"It is that," said Sergeant Dalziel.

CHAPTER XX

FARREN'S STORY

GILDA FARREN SAT, UPRIGHT AS A LILY-STALK, IN THE high-backed chair, spinning wool. Her dress was mediæval, with its close bodice and full, long skirt, just lifted from the ground by the foot that swayed placidly upon the treadle. It had a square neck and long, close-fitting sleeves, and it was made of a fine cream-coloured serge which gave her an air of stately purity. Besides, it had the advantage of not showing the fluff of white wool which settles all over the spinning-woman and tends to give her the appearance of a person who has slept in her clothes. Lord Peter Wimsey, seated rather closely beside her, to avoid the draught from the whirling wheel, noted this detail with sardonic appreciation.

"Well, Mrs. Farren," he said, cheerfully, "we shall soon have the truant husband back now."

The long hands seemed to falter for a moment in feeding the flock to the spindle, and the thread ran fine and thickened again.

"What makes you think that?" asked Mrs. Farren, never turning her red-gold head.

"All-stations call," said Wimsey, lighting another cigarette. "Nothing agitating, you know. Anxious friends and relations, and all that."

"That," said Mrs. Farren, "is a very great impertinence."

"I admit," said Wimsey, "that you don't seem frightfully anxious. If it isn't rude to ask, why aren't you?"

"I think it is rather rude," said Mrs. Farren.

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"Sorry," said Wimsey, "but the question remains. Why aren't you? Abandoned bicycle—dangerous old mine—indefatigable police with ropes and grappling-hooks—empty chair—deserted home—and a lady who sits spinning an even thread. It might be thought puzzling."

"I have already said," replied Mrs. Farren, "that I consider all that story about mines and suicide to be absurd. I am not responsible for the foolish ideas of country policemen. I resent this inquisitiveness about my private affairs extremely. The police I can forgive, Lord Peter, but what business is it of yours?"

"None whatever," said Wimsey, cheerfully. "Only, if you cared to tell me the facts, I might be able to quell the riot."

"What facts?"

"You might tell me, for instance," said Wimsey, "where the letter came from."

The right hand paused and fumbled in its task. The thread whisked out of the left-hand thumb and finger and wound itself up sharply on the spindle. Mrs. Farren uttered a little exclamation of annoyance, stopped the wheel, and unwound the thread again.

"I beg your pardon," she said, when she had made the join in the wool. She re-started the wheel with a light touch of the hand. "What was that you said?"

"I said you might tell me where the letter came from."

"What letter?"

"The letter your husband wrote you on Thursday."

"If," said Mrs. Farren, "the police have been tampering with my correspondence, they can probably give you all the information you want—unless, of course, they also dislike interference."

Her breath was coming short and angrily.

"Well," replied Wimsey, "as a matter of fact they

omitted that simple precaution. But since you admit the existence of the letter ——”

“ I admit nothing of the sort.”

“ Come now,” said Wimsey. “ You are not one of Nature’s gifted liars, Mrs. Farren. Up to Thursday, you were genuinely frightened and anxious about your husband. On Friday you were pretending to be anxious, but you were not. To-day I suggest that you received a letter from your husband on Friday morning, and you leap to the conclusion that the police have been investigating your correspondence. Therefore you did receive a letter. Why deny it? ”

“ Why should I tell you anything about it? ”

“ Why indeed? I have only to wait a day or two and I shall get the answer from Scotland Yard.”

“ What has Scotland Yard to do with it? ”

“ Surely, Mrs. Farren, you must know that your husband is, or may be, a valuable witness in the Campbell case? ”

“ Why? ”

“ Well, you know, he went off from here looking for Campbell. He was last heard of inquiring for Campbell in Gatehouse. It would be interesting to know if he did meet Campbell—wouldn’t it? ”

“ Lord Peter Wimsey!” Mrs. Farren stopped the wheel and turned indignantly to face him. “ Have you ever thought how contemptible you are? We have received you here in Kirkcudbright as a friend. Everybody has shown you kindness. And you repay it by coming into the houses of your friends as a police-spy. If there is anything meaner than a man who tries to bully and trap a woman into betraying her husband, it is the wife who falls into the trap! ”

“ Mrs. Farren,” said Wimsey, getting up, with a white face, “ if it is a question of betrayal, then I beg your pardon. I shall say nothing to the police about the letter or about

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what you have just said. But in that case I can only say again—and this time as a warning—that they have sent out an all-stations call from London and that from to-day your correspondence *will* be watched. In telling you so, I am possibly betraying official secrets and making myself an accessory after the fact to a murder. However ——”

“How dare you?”

“To be frank with you,” said Wimsey, taking the question at its face-value, “I do not think I am running any very great risk. If I did, I might be more cautious.”

“Do you dare to suggest that I believe my husband to be guilty of murder?”

“If I must answer that, then—I think you have thought so. I am not sure that you do not think so now. But I thought it possible that you believed him innocent, in which case, the sooner he returns to give an account of himself, the better for himself and for everybody.”

He took up his hat and turned to go. He had his hand on the latch when she called him back.

“Lord Peter!”

“Think before you speak,” he said hastily.

“You—you are quite mistaken. I am sure my husband is innocent. There is another reason ——”

He looked at her.

“Ah!” he said. “Stupid of me. It is your own pride that you are sheltering now.” He came back into the room, treading gently, and laid his hat on the table. “My dear Mrs. Farren, will you believe me when I say that all men—the best and the worst alike—have these moments of rebellion and distaste? It is nothing. It is a case for understanding and—if I may say so—response.”

“I am ready,” said Gilda Farren, “to forgive ——”

“Never do that,” said Wimsey. “Forgiveness is the one

unpardonable sin. It is almost better to make a scene—though,” he added, thoughtfully, “that depends on the bloke’s temperament.”

“I should certainly not make a scene,” said Mrs. Farren.

“No,” said Wimsey. “I see that.”

“I shall not do anything,” said Mrs. Farren. “To be insulted was enough. To be deserted as well——” Her eyes were hard and angry. “If he chooses to come back, I shall receive him, naturally. But it is nothing to me what he chooses to do with himself. There seems to be no end to what women have to endure. I should not say as much as this to you, if——”

“If I didn’t know it already,” put in Wimsey.

“I have tried to look as though nothing was the matter,” said Mrs. Farren, “and to put a good face on it. I do not want to show my husband up before his friends.”

“Quite so,” said Wimsey. “Besides,” he added, rather brutally, “it might look as though you yourself had failed in some way.”

“I have always done my duty as his wife.”

“Too true,” said Wimsey. “He put you up on a pedestal, and you have sat on it ever since. What more could you do?”

“I have been faithful to him,” said Mrs. Farren, with rising temper. “I have worked to keep the house beautiful and—and to make it a place of refreshment and inspiration. I have done all I could to further his ambitions. I have borne my share of the household expenses——” Here she seemed suddenly to become aware of a tinge of bathos and went on hurriedly, “You may think all this is nothing, but it means sacrifice and hard work.”

“I know that,” replied Wimsey, quietly.

“Is it my fault that—just because this house was always a peaceful and beautiful place—that unhappy man should

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have come to me to tell me his troubles? Is that any reason why I should be outraged by vile suspicions? Do *you* believe there was anything more than sympathy in my feelings for Sandy Campbell?"

"Not for a moment," said Wimsey.

"Then why couldn't my husband believe it?"

"Because he was in love with you."

"That is not the kind of love I recognise as love. If he loved me he should have trusted me."

"As a matter of fact," said Wimsey, "I quite agree with you. But everybody has his own ideas about love, and Hugh Farren is a decent man."

"Is it decent to believe vile things of other people?"

"Well—the two things often go together, I'm afraid. I mean, virtuous people are generally rather stupid about those things. That's why bad men always have devoted wives—they're not stupid. Same with bad women—they usually have their husbands on a lead. It oughtn't to be like that, but there it is."

"Do you consider yourself a decent man when you talk like that?"

"Oh dear no," said Wimsey. "But I'm not stupid. My wife won't have that to complain of."

"You seem to imagine that infidelity is a trifle, compared with ——"

"With stupidity. I don't quite say that. But the one can cause quite as much upheaval as the other, and the trouble is that it's incurable. One of those things one has to put up with. I shan't necessarily be unfaithful to my wife, but I shall know enough about infidelity to know it when I see it, and not mistake other things for it. If I were married to you, for example, I should know that under no circumstances would you ever be unfaithful to me. For one thing,

you haven't got the temperament. For another, you would never like to think less of yourself than you do. For a third, it would offend your æsthetic taste. And for a fourth, it would give other people a handle against you."

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Farren, "your reasons are more insulting than my husband's suspicions."

"You're quite right," said Wimsey. "They are."

"If Hugh were here," said Mrs. Farren, "he would throw you out of the window."

"Probably," said Wimsey. "In fact, now that I've put it to you in the right light, you can see that his attitude towards you is rather a compliment than otherwise."

"Go and see him," said Mrs. Farren, fiercely. "Tell him what you have been saying to me—if you dare—and see what he says to you."

"With pleasure," said Wimsey, "if you will give me his address."

"I don't know it," said Mrs. Farren, shortly. "But the postmark was Brough in Westmorland."

"Thank you," said Wimsey, "I will go and see him—and, by the way, I shall not mention this to the police."

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At an early hour on Monday morning, a large black Daimler car, with an outsize bonnet and racing body, moved in leisurely silence down the main street of Brough. The driver, glancing carelessly from side to side through his monocle, appeared to be about to pull up at the principal hotel; then, suddenly changing his mind, he moved forward again, and eventually stopped the car before a smaller inn, distinguished by the effigy of a spirited bull, careering ferociously in an emerald green meadow beneath a bright summer sky.

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He pushed open the door and strode in. The innkeeper was polishing glasses in the bar, and bade him a polite good morning.

"A fine morning," said the traveller.

"Ay, so 'tis," agreed the innkeeper.

"Can you give me a bit of breakfast?"

The innkeeper appeared to turn this suggestion over in his mind.

"Hey, mother!" he bellowed at last, turning towards an inner door, "canst a' give breakfast to t' gentleman?"

His shout brought out a comely woman in the middle forties who, after looking the gentleman over and summing him up, reckoned that she could, if a dish of eggs and Cumberland ham would suit the gentleman.

Nothing could be better, in the gentleman's opinion. He was ushered into a parlour full of plush-covered chairs and stuffed birds, and invited to take a seat. After an interval, a sturdy young woman appeared to lay the table. After a further interval came a large and steaming tea-pot, a home-baked loaf, a plate of buns, a large pat of butter and two sorts of jam. Finally, the landlady reappeared, escorting the ham and eggs in person.

The motorist complimented her on the excellence of the food and fell to with an appetite, mentioning that he had just come down from Scotland. He made a few sensible observations on the curing of hams, and gave an intelligent account of the method used in Ayrshire. He also inquired particularly after a certain kind of cheese peculiar to the district. The landlady—in whom the monocle had at first raised some doubts—began to think that he was a more homely body than he appeared at first sight, and obligingly offered to send the girl round to the shop to procure a cheese for him.

"I can see you know the town, sir," she observed.

"Oh, yes—I've been through here lots of times, though I don't think I've ever pulled up here before. You're looking very smart and all that—got the old Bull repainted, I see."

"Ah, you noticed 'en, sir. Well, that was nobbut finished yesterday. 'Twas done by a painter gentleman. He came walking into t' bar Thursday and says to George, 'Landlord,' he says, 'the signboard would do wi' a bit paint. If I make 'ee a fine new bull for 'en, will 'ee let me have a room cheap?' George, he didn't know what to think, but t' gentleman says, 'Look here,' he says, 'I'll make 'ee a fair offer. Here's my money. Gie me my food and lodging and I'll do my best by t' bull, and if tha likes 'en when a's done, tha canst allow what tha likes for 'en on t' bill.' On walking-tour, a' said a' was, and a' had one of these little boxes full of paints wi' 'en, so that we could see a' was an artist."

"Funny," said the motorist. "Had he any luggage?"

"A little bag-like—nothing much. But anybody could see a' was a gentleman. Well, George didn't know what to think."

From what the traveller had seen of George, this seemed very probable. There was a kind of stolid dignity about George which suggested that he disliked being flurried.

Apparently, however, the mysterious artist had then and there, with a piece of black stuff, sketched on the back of an envelope a bull so rampant, so fierce, so full of fire and vigour, as to appeal very strongly to George's agrarian instincts. After some discussion, the bargain was struck, the old bull taken down and the paints brought out. On Thursday the new bull had made his appearance on one side of the sign, head down and tail up, steam issuing from his nostrils, and the painter had explained that this represented the frame of mind of the hungry traveller bellowing for his

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food. On Friday, a second bull was drawn and coloured on the other side, sleek, handsome and contented, having fed well and received the best of treatment. On Saturday, the sign had been set out to dry in the wash-house. On Sunday, the painter had applied a coat of varnish on both sides and set the board back in the wash-house. On Sunday night, the varnish, though still a little tacky, seemed to be dry enough to allow of the sign's being put in place, and there it was. The painter had taken his departure on foot on Sunday afternoon. George had been so pleased with the bull that he had refused to take any money at all from the gentleman, and had given him an introduction to a friend of his in a neighbouring village, who also had a sign that needed renewal.

The motorist listened with great interest to this story and carelessly inquired the painter's name. The landlady produced her visitors' book.

"'Tis wrote here," said she. "Mr. H. Ford of London, but by a's speech you'd ha' taken 'en for a Scotsman."

The motorist looked down at the book, with a slight smile twisting the corners of his long mouth. Then he pulled a fountain-pen from his pocket and wrote, beneath the signature of Mr. H. Ford:

"Peter Wimsey. Kirkcudbright. Good baiting at the Bull."

Then, getting up and buckling the belt of his leather coat, he observed, pleasantly:

"If any friends of mine should come inquiring for Mr. Ford, be sure you show them that book, and say I left my compliments for Mr. Parker of London."

"Mester Parker?" said the landlady, mystified, but impressed. "Well, to be sure, I'll tell 'en, sir."

Wimsey paid his bill and went out. As he drove away he saw her standing, book in hand, under the signboard, staring at the bull which capered so bravely on the bright green grass.

The village mentioned by the landlady was only about six miles from Brough, and was reached by a side-turning. It possessed only one inn, and that inn had no sign, only an empty iron bracket. Wimsey smiled again, stopped his car at the door and passed into the bar, where he ordered a tankard of beer.

"What's the name of your inn?" he asked, presently.

The landlord, a brisk Southerner, grinned widely.

"Dog and Gun, sir. The sign's took down to be repainted. Gentleman a-workin' on it now in the back garden. One of these travelling painter chaps—gentleman, though. Comes from over the Border by his way o' talkin'. Old George Wetherby sent him on here. Tells me he's made a good job o' the old Bull in Brough. Working his way down to London, by what I can make out. Very pleasant gentleman. Real artist—paints pictures for the London shows, or so he tells me. My sign won't be any the worse for a dab o' fresh paint—besides, it amuses the kids to watch him muckin' about."

"Nothing I like better myself," said Wimsey, "than to hang round while another fellow does a spot of work."

"No? Well, that's so, sir. If you like to step into the garden, sir, you'll see him."

Wimsey laughed and wandered out, tankard in hand. He dodged under a little archway, covered with a tangle of faded ramblers, and there, sure enough, squatting on an upturned bucket with the signboard of the Dog and Gun propped on a kitchen-chair before him, was the missing

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Hugh Farren, whistling cheerfully, as he squeezed out paint upon his palette.

Farren's back was turned towards Wimsey and he did not turn his head. Three children watched, fascinated, as the thick blobs of colour oozed out on to the board.

"What's that, mister?"

"That's the green for the gentleman's coat. No—don't pinch it, or you'll get it all over you. Yes, you can put the cap on. Yes, that's to keep it from drying up. Yes, put it back in the box. . . . That's yellow. No, I know there isn't any yellow in the picture, but I want it to mix with the green to make it brighter. You'll see. Don't forget the cap. What? Oh, anywhere in the box. White—yes, it's a big tube, isn't it? You see, you have to put a little white into most of the colours—why? Well, they wouldn't come right without it. You'll see when I do the sky. What's that? You want the dog made white all over? No, I can't make it a picture of Scruggs. Why not? Well, Scruggs isn't the right sort of dog to take out shooting. Well, he's not, that's why. This has got to be a retriever. All right, well, I'll put in a liver-and-white spaniel. Oh, well, it's rather a pretty dog with long ears. Yes, I daresay it is like Colonel Amery's. No, I don't know Colonel Amery. Did you put the cap on that white paint? Dash it! if you go losing things like that I'll send you back to Mother and she'll spank you. What? Well, the gentleman has a green coat because he's a gamekeeper. Possibly Colonel Amery's gamekeeper doesn't, but this one does. No, I don't know why gamekeepers wear green coats—to keep them warm, I expect. No, I haven't got any brown paint same as that tree-trunk. I get that by mixing other colours. No, I've got all the colours I want now. You can put 'em away and shut the box. Yes, I can tell pretty well how much I want before I start. That's called a palette

knife. No, it isn't meant to be sharp. It's meant for cleaning your palette and so on. Some people use a knife to paint with. Yes, it's nice and wiggly, but it won't stand too much of that kind of treatment, my lad. Yes, of course you can paint with a knife if you want to. You can paint with your fingers if it comes to that. No, I shouldn't advise you to try. Yes, well, it makes a rougher kind of surface, all blobs and chunks of paint. All right, I'll show you presently. Yes, I'm going to begin with the sky. Why? Well, why do you think? Yes, because it's at the top. Yes, of course that blue's too dark, but I'm going to put some white in it. Yes, *and* some green. You didn't know there was any green in the sky? Well, there is. And sometimes there's purple and pink too. No, I'm not going to paint a purple and pink sky. The gentleman and the dogs have only just started out. It's morning in this picture. Yes, I know, on the other side they're coming home with a lot of birds and things. I'll put a pink and purple sunset into that if you're good and don't ask too many questions. No, be a good girl and don't joggle my arm. Oh, Lord!"

"Hullo, Farren!" said Wimsey. "Finding the young idea a bit too eager for information, eh?"

"My God!" said the painter. "Wimsey, by all that's holy! How did you get here? Don't say my wife sent you!"

"Not exactly," said Wimsey. "And yet, now you mention it, I believe she did do something of the sort."

Farren sighed.

"Come on," he said. "Spit it out and get it over. Run away to your mother, bairns. I've got to talk to this gentleman."

"Look here," said Wimsey, when they were alone. "I want to say, first of all, that I haven't the faintest right to

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ask questions. But I'd be damned glad if you'd tell me exactly what you've been up to since Monday night."

"I suppose my conduct is being harshly criticised at Kirkcudbright," said Farren. "Deserting the home, and all that?"

"Well, no," said Wimsey. "Your wife has stuck to it that there's nothing unusual in your disappearance. But—as a matter of fact—the police have been hunting for you everywhere."

"The police? Why in the world ——?"

"I think I'll smoke a pipe," said Wimsey. "Well, the fact that you were talking rather wildly about suicide and other things, don't you know. And then your bicycle being found close to those old mines up beyond Creetown. It—suggested things, you see."

"Oh! I'd forgotten about the bicycle. Yes, but surely Gilda—I wrote to her."

"She isn't worried about that, now."

"I suppose she must have been rather anxious. I ought to have written earlier. But—damn it! I never thought about their finding that. And—by Jove! old Strachan will have been in a bit of a stew."

"Why Strachan, particularly?"

"Well, surely he told people—didn't he?"

"Look here, Farren, what the devil are you talking about?"

"About Monday night. Poor old Strachan! He must have thought I'd really gone and done it."

"When did you see Strachan, then?"

"Why, that night, up by the mines. Didn't you know?"

"I don't know anything," said Wimsey. "Suppose you tell me the story right end foremost."

"All right. I don't mind. I suppose you know that I had

a bit of a row that night with Campbell. Oh! that reminds me, Wimsey. Didn't I see something funny in the paper about Campbell? Something about his being found dead?"

"He's been murdered," said Wimsey, abruptly.

"Murdered? That wasn't what I saw. But I haven't looked at a paper for days. I only saw—when was it?—Wednesday morning, I think—something about 'well-known Scottish painter found dead in a river.'"

"Oh, well, it hadn't got out then. But he was bumped off, as a matter of fact, some time on Monday night or Tuesday morning—up at the Minnoch."

"Was he? Serve the beggar right. Oh, by the way, I seem to see something behind this. Am I supposed to have done it, Wimsey?"

"I don't know," said Wimsey, truthfully. "But there is a feeling that perhaps you ought to come forward and say something. You were looking for him, you know, on Monday night."

"Yes, I was. And if I'd met him, there *would* have been murder done. But as a matter of fact, I didn't meet him."

"You can prove that?"

"Well—I don't know that I can if it comes to that. This isn't serious, is it?"

"I don't know. Let's have the story, Farren."

"I see. Well. Well, I came home about six o'clock on Monday and found that blighter making love to my wife. I was fed up, Wimsey. I hoofed him out and I daresay I made a bit of an ass of myself."

"Wait a minute. Did you actually see Campbell?"

"He was just making off when I came in. I told him to clear out, and then I went in and spoke my mind. I told Gilda I wouldn't have the fellow there. She stuck up for him, and that annoyed me. Mind you, Wimsey, I haven't a

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word against Gilda except that she can't and won't understand that Campbell is—was—a poisonous sort of hound and that she was making me a laughing-stock. She's got an idea about being kind and sympathetic, and she can't see that that sort of thing doesn't work with fellows like Campbell. Dash it all, I *know* the blighter was crazy about her. And when I tried, quite nicely, to point out that she was making a fool of herself, she got on her high horse and —— Damn it, Wimsey! I don't want to talk like a pig about my wife, but the fact is, she's too good and too full of ideals to understand what the ordinary man is like. You do see what I mean? ”

“ Perfectly,” said Wimsey.

“ Because my wife really is a wonderful woman. Only—well, I daresay I said a lot of silly things.”

“ I know exactly the sort of thing you said,” observed Wimsey. “ She didn't tell me, but I can imagine it. You stormed about, and she told you not to have coarse ideas, and you got hotter, and she got colder, and you said things you didn't mean in the hope of bringing her to your arms, so to speak, and then she said you were insulting and burst into tears, and then you worked yourself up into half-believing the accusations you'd only made to annoy her, and then you threatened murder and suicide and went out to get drunk. Bless your soul, you're not the first and won't be the last.”

“ Well, you've got it about right,” said Farren. “ Only I really did begin to believe it at the time. At least, I believed Campbell was out to do all the mischief he could. I did get drunk. I had one or two in the town, and then I barged off to Gatehouse to find Campbell.”

“ How did you miss him in Kirkcudbright? He was at the McClellan Arms all the time.”

"I never thought of that. I just hared off to Gatehouse. He wasn't in his cottage, and Ferguson yelled out to me. I thought of having a row with Ferguson, but I wasn't as drunk as all that. Then I went and had a few more. Somebody told me they'd seen Campbell go out to Creetown, so I went after him."

"No, you didn't," said Wimsey. "You went up the road to the golf-links."

"Did I? Oh, yes, so I did. I went to find Strachan, but he was out. I left a note or a message for him, I think; to tell the truth, I'm not very clear about it. But I think I told him I was going to Creetown to do Campbell in and cut my own throat. Some rot or other. . . . I say, poor old Strachan! He must have had a time! Did he show that note to the police?"

"Not that I know of."

"Oh! no, I suppose he wouldn't. Strachan's a good sort. Well, I went over to Creetown. The pubs were shut when I got there, but I went in and got hold of a man there—by Jove! no, I suppose he wouldn't have come forward, either. Well, never mind the man—I don't want to get him into trouble. The point is that I raised a bottle of whiskey after closing-time."

"Yes?"

"Well, I'm a bit vague about the next part of it, but I know I remember going up into the hills, with some vague idea of chucking myself down one of the pits. I wandered round. I remember wheeling the damned bike over the rough stuff—and then, damn it all, I came to the mouth of one of the mines. Nearly fell into it. I sat down and moralised a bit on the brink, with the help of the whiskey. I must have been damned drunk. I don't know how long that lasted. Well, then, presently I heard somebody shouting and I shouted

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back. I felt like that. Somebody came up, and started talking. It was old Strachan. At least, my impression is that it was Strachan, but I freely admit that I may be mixing things up a bit. I know he talked and talked and tried to get hold of me, and I struggled and fought him. It was a lovely fight, I do know that. Then I knocked him down and started to run. I ran like hell. My God! it was fine. Drink takes me in the head, you know; my legs are always all right. I simply bounced over the heather, and the stars bounced along with me. Good God! I remember that now. I don't know how long it went on. And then I lost my footing and went rolling away down a slope somewhere. I suppose I fetched up all right at the bottom, because, when I woke it was well on in the morning, and I was lying in a sort of hollow among the bracken, quite snug and cosy and without so much as a headache.

"I didn't know where I was. But I didn't care. I just felt that nothing mattered at all. I didn't want to go home. I didn't care a hang about Campbell. I just felt as if all the cares of the world had tumbled off my back and left me alone in the sunshine. I walked straight ahead. I was getting damned hungry by that time, because I'd had no dinner the night before, but there wasn't so much as a shepherd's hut in sight. I walked and walked. The place was full of wee burns and I had plenty to drink. After hours and hours I struck a road and walked along, not meeting anybody. And then, some time about mid-day, I crossed a bridge and knew where I was. It was the place they call New Brig o' Dee, on the New Galloway Road. I hadn't really come so very far. I expect I must have made a bit of a circle, though I thought I was keeping the sun on my right all the time."

"The sun moves, you know," said Wimsey, "or appears to."

"Yes—I don't think I realised how long I'd been going. Anyhow, I got there, and started to walk towards New Galloway. I met some sheep and a few cows and carts, and at last a fellow with a lorry overtook me. He took me as far as New Galloway, and I got something to eat there."

"What time was that?" asked Wimsey, quickly.

"Oh, it must have been nearly three. Then I wondered what to do with myself. I'd got about ten pounds in my pocket and my one idea was that I didn't want to go back. I was finished. Done. I wanted to go gipsying. I didn't give a damn if I never saw the Tolbooth spire again. I saw an empty lorry labelled with the name of a Glasgow firm on it, and I bargained with the man to take me to Dumfries. They were going that way."

"What was the name of the firm?"

"Eh? Oh, I don't know. There were two very decent fellows on it and we talked about fishing."

"Where did they put you off?"

"Just before we got to Dumfries. I wanted to think a bit, you see. It was a question whether I'd take the train there or put up in some pub or other. I was afraid of running into some of our crowd at the station. Besides, some of the railway people there would have known me. I often go to Dumfries. That was the trouble about the pub idea too. . . . I don't know if I can explain how I felt, Wimsey. It was as if I'd escaped from something and was afraid of being—well, bagged. I mean, if I had met anyone who knew me, I should have fudged up some tale about fishing or painting and made everything sound quite ordinary, and then I should have gone home. You see? It wouldn't have been the same if I'd had to make up an elaborate deception about it. You're not free when you have to tell lies to escape. It's not worth it. I can't possibly make you understand that."

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"Why not?" said Wimsey. "It would be like buying a week-end wedding-ring."

"Yes—just as tedious as if it were 22-carat. And signing the hotel register and wondering if the reception-clerk believed you. Wimsey, you're rich and there's nothing to stop you from doing what you like. Why do you trouble to be respectable?"

"Just because there's nothing to stop me from doing what I like, probably. I get my fun out of it."

"I know you do," said Farren, looking at him in a puzzled way. "It's odd. You create an illusion of liberty. Is it money? Or is it being unmarried? But there are plenty of unmarried men who don't ——"

"Aren't we wandering slightly from the matter in hand?" said Wimsey.

"Perhaps. Well—I went into a little inn—a one-horse little place—and had a drink in the four-ale bar. There was a young fellow there with a bike and side-car. He said he was going through to Carlisle. That gave me an idea. I asked him if he'd take me and he said he would. He was a decent bloke and didn't ask any questions."

"What was his name?"

"I didn't ask, nor did he. I said I was on a walking-tour and that my belongings were waiting for me in Carlisle. But he didn't seem to bother. I never met such a reasonable man."

"What was he?"

"I gathered that he had something to do with the second-hand motor trade and was taking the bike in part-exchange for something. I shouldn't have known that, only he apologised for its internals not being in perfect trim. In fact, something went wrong with them on the road and I had to hold an electric torch for him while he put it right. He didn't seem to have many ideas beyond plugs and things.

He didn't talk. Said he'd been thirty-six hours on the road, but I needn't worry, because he could drive in his sleep."

Wimsey nodded. He knew the helots of the second-hand-motor trade. Grim, silent, cynical, abroad at all hours and in all weathers, they are men accustomed to disillusionment and disaster. To deliver their melancholy screws to their customers and depart before inconvenient discoveries are made; to scramble home with their surprise-packets of old iron before the patched radiator bursts or the clutch gives way—this is their sole preoccupation. Always dog-tired, dirty and prepared for the worst, habitually hard-up and morose, they are not likely to be inquisitive about stranded travellers who offer to pay for a lift.

"So you got to Carlisle?"

"Yes. I slept most of the time, except, of course, when I was holding the torch. I enjoyed the bits when I was awake. Not knowing who he was made it better. Do you know, I hadn't been in a side-car before. It's not like a car. Cars fascinate me, too, though the only two or three times I tried to drive one I didn't get much kick out of it. I like *being* driven—and this side-car business gets my imagination. The power is outside you, and you are pulled along—in tow, so to speak. Like being eloped with. You seem to notice the strength of the machine more than you do in a car. Why is that?"

Wimsey shook his head.

"Perhaps I was imagining things. Well, anyhow, we got to Carlisle in the morning and I had some grub in a sort of tea-shop place. Then, of course, I had to decide on something. I bought a clean shirt and some socks and a tooth-brush and so on, and a knapsack to shove them into. It was only then that I thought about money. I'd have to cash a cheque somewhere. But that meant telling people where I

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was. I mean, the bank people would have to ring up Kirkcudbright and all that. I thought it would be more fun to pay my way. I'd still got enough to buy paints with, so I went into an art-dealers' and got a box and a palette and some brushes and colours ——"

"Winsor & Newton, I observe," said Wimsey.

"Yes. You can get them easily in most places, you know. I usually get my stuff from Paris, but Winsor & Newton are perfectly reliable. I thought I'd make my way down into the Lake Country and paint little pictures for tourists or something. It's fearfully easy. You can knock off two or three in a day—hills and water and mists, you know—and idiots will give you ten bob a time, if the stuff's sentimental enough. I knew a man who always paid for his holidays that way. Didn't sign 'em in his own name, naturally. It's a form of mass-production."

"Hence the idea of Mr. H. Ford?"

"Oh, you've been to the Bull at Brough? Yes—the idea rather tickled me. Well, after I'd bought the paints I had just about enough left to bribe another lorry-driver. But I didn't. I found a man with a Riley—Oxford fellow—a frightfully good sort. He was heading south and told me I could go as far as I liked with him and damn paying for it. He talked all right. His name was John Barrett and he was just fooling round amusing himself. Didn't know where he was going. Had just got the new car and wanted to see what she could do. Damn it, he did, too. I was never so frightened in my life."

"Where did he live?"

"Oh, London, somewhere. He told me the place, but I can't remember it now. He asked a lot of questions, too, but I just said I was a travelling artist and he thought it was a fearfully good wheeze. I didn't mind telling him that, be-

cause by that time it was true, you see. He asked what one could make out of it and all that, and I gave him all the stuff I'd had from my friend, and he asked me where I'd been last and I said in Galloway. It was just as easy as that. But when we got to Brough, I said I'd get off there. I felt I was too young to die—just as I was starting off on an adventure, too. He was a bit disappointed, but he wished me luck and all that. I went to the Bull, because it looked less grand than the other place, and that was where I got the idea about the sign. Good thing I did, too, because the weather turned nasty the next day, and I hadn't altogether reckoned with that when I made my plan about doing the hills and lakes and things. So that was that, and here I am."

Farren took up his brushes again and renewed his assault upon the Dog and Gun.

"Very jolly," said Wimsey. "But you know, it all boils down to this, that you can't produce a single witness to say where you were between Monday night and Tuesday afternoon at 3 o'clock."

"Oh! no—I'd forgotten about all that. But, I mean, all this isn't serious, really? And after all, I've got a perfectly natural, straightforward explanation."

"It sounds natural enough to me, perhaps," said Wimsey, "but whether the police will take that view——"

"Damn the police! I say, Wimsey——"

The shadow of something cold and deadly crept into the painter's eyes.

"Does this mean I've got to go back, Wimsey?"

"I'm afraid," said Wimsey, "I'm very much afraid——" He was looking back over Farren's shoulder at the back door of the inn, from which two squarely-built men in tweeds were emerging. Farren, catching the infection of uneasiness, turned his head.

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"My God," he said. "It's all up. Bagged. Trapped. Prison."

"Yes," said Wimsey, almost inaudibly. "And you won't escape this time—ever."

CHAPTER XXI

STRACHAN'S STORY

"BICYCLES?" SAID INSPECTOR MACPHERSON. "DINNA YE talk tae me o' bicycles. I'm fair fed up wi' the name o' them. Wad ye believe that there could be sic a stour aboot twa-three bicycles? Here's ane o' them at Euston and anither up at Creetoon, and as if that wasn't eneugh, here's Waters' bicycle vanished and naebody kens whether we should arrest Waters for murder or make a sairch for a bicycle-thief."

"It's very trying," said Wimsey. "And I suppose nobody saw Waters go aboard at the Doon?"

"An' if onybody had seen him," said the Inspector, wrathfully, "wad I be fashin' masel' the noo? There's a mon saw anither mon wadin' across the sand, but he was half a mile off, an' whae's tae say it was Waters?"

"I must say," said Wimsey, "that I never in all my life heard of such an unconvincing bunch of alibis. By the way, Inspector, did you check up that story of Ferguson's?"

"Ferguson?" said the Inspector, in the resentful accents of a schoolboy burdened with too much homework. "Oo, ay, we havena forgot Ferguson. I went tae Sparkes & Crisp an' interviewed the employees. There was twa of them remembered him weel eneugh. The lad doonstairs in the show-room couldna speak with sairtainty tae the time, but he recognised Ferguson from his photograph as havin' brocht in a magneto on the Monday afternoon. He said Mr. Saunders wad be the man tae see tae that, and pit a ca' through on the house telephone tae Mr. Sparkes, an' he had the young fellow in. Saunders is ane o' they bright lads. He

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picked the photograph at once oot o' the six I showed him an' turned up the entry o' the magneto in the day-book."

"Could he swear to the time Ferguson came in?"

"He wadna charge his memory wi' the precise minute, but he said he had juist come in fra' his lunch an' found Ferguson waitin' for him. His lunch-time is fra' 1.30 tae 2.30, but he was a bit late that day, an' Ferguson had been waitin' on him a wee while. He thinks it wad be aboot ten minutes tae three."

"That's just about what Ferguson made it."

"Near eneugh."

"H'm. That sounds all right. Was that all Saunders had to say?"

"Ay. Forbye that he said he couldna weel understand whit had happened tae the magneto. He said it looked as though some yin had been daein' it a wilfu' damage."

"That's funny. That would be the mechanic's report, of course. Did you see the mechanic at all?"

The Inspector admitted that he had not done so, not seeing what bearing it could have upon the case.

"Was you thinkin', maybe," he suggested, "that some felonious body was interested in seein' that Ferguson didna take oot his car that mornin'?"

"Inspector," said Wimsey, "you are a mind-reader. I was thinking exactly that."

Farren had returned to Kirkcudbright. His dream of escape had vanished. His wife had forgiven him. His absence was explained as a trifling and whimsical eccentricity. Gilda Farren sat, upright and serene, spinning the loose white flock into a strong thread that wound itself ineluctably to smother the twirling spindle. The story had been told to the police. Sir Maxwell Jamieson shook his head over it. Short of arresting Farren, they must remain content with his story or

else disprove it. And they could not very well arrest Farren, for they might want to arrest Waters or Gowan or Graham or even Strachan, all of whose stories were equally odd and suspicious. It would be preposterous to arrest five people for one crime.

The porter at Girvan was still desperately ill. He had—out of pure perversity, no doubt—developed peritonitis. The Euston bicycle had been duly identified as the property of young Andrew of the Anwoth, but what evidence was there that it had any connection with Campbell? If Farren were the murderer it had obviously no connection with it at all, for Farren could not have taken the Ayr train at Girvan and been in New Galloway at 3 o'clock. And that part of Farren's story was true, anyway, for they had checked it. No, Farren, like the rest, must have rope given him. So Farren sat sulkily in his studio and Mrs. Farren span—not a rope, perhaps, but fetters at any rate—in the sitting-room with the cool blue curtains.

The Chief Constable took upon himself the task of interviewing Strachan, who received him with politeness, but without enthusiasm.

"We have obtained a statement from Mr. Farren," said Sir Maxwell, "with reference to his movements on Monday night and Tuesday morning, which requires your corroboration."

"Indeed," said Strachan. "In what way?"

"Come," said the Chief Constable, "you know very well in what way. We know, from Mr. Farren's story, that you have not told us all the facts about your own movements at that time. Now that Mr. Farren has given his explanation, you have no longer any reason for reticence."

"I don't altogether understand this," said Strachan. "Mr. Farren, as I am told, went for a holiday trip to England and

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has returned. Why should I answer any questions about his private affairs? To what is the inquiry directed?"

"Mr. Strachan," said the Chief Constable, "I do most earnestly beg you not to take up this attitude. It can do no good and only creates difficulties and, if I may say so, suspicion. You are perfectly well aware that we are inquiring into the circumstances of Mr. Campbell's murder, and that it is absolutely necessary for us to obtain information about all the persons who saw Mr. Campbell shortly before his death. Mr. Farren saw him at 6 o'clock on Monday week, and he has given us an account of his movements since that time. This account requires your corroboration. If you can give it, where is the point of refusing?"

"The point is," said Strachan, "that Mr. Farren is going about at liberty, and that therefore, presumably, you have nothing against him. In that case, I am not bound to answer any impertinent queries about his behaviour or his personal affairs. If, on the other hand, you intend to accuse him or me of anything criminal, it is your duty to say so, and also to warn us that we are not obliged to answer your questions."

"Of course," said Sir Maxwell, smothering his annoyance, "you are not in any way bound to answer if you think that by so doing you will incriminate yourself. But you cannot prevent us from drawing the natural conclusion from your refusal."

"Is that a threat?"

"Certainly not. It is a warning."

"And if I thank you for the warning and still decline to make a statement?"

"In that case, well ——"

"In that case your only alternative is to arrest me and charge me with murder, or with complicity. Are you prepared to go as far as that?"

The Chief Constable was not by any means prepared, but he replied, curtly:

"You will have to take your chance of that."

Strachan paused, tapping his fingers on the table. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly, and the voice of Myra floated in from the garden, playing at tig with her mother and the nurse.

"Very well," said Strachan, at last. "What does Farren say that wants my corroboration?"

Sir Maxwell Jamieson was annoyed again at the obviousness of this trap.

"I am afraid that won't do, Mr. Strachan," he said, a little acidly. "It will be better, I think, that you should begin from the beginning and give me your own account of what happened."

"What do you call the beginning?"

"Begin by saying where you were on Monday afternoon."

"On Monday afternoon? I was out, painting."

"Whereabouts?"

"Up at Balmae. Would you like proof of that? I can show you the canvas, but of course that won't bear visible signs of having been painted on Monday. However, I dare-say somebody saw the car. I stuck it in a field and walked down to the edge of the cliff. Subject of the painting, Ross Island. Price, when finished, 50 guineas."

"What time did you leave there?"

"About half-past seven."

"Did the light remain good as long as that?"

"Good heavens!" said Strachan. "Are the police going to display intelligence about art? No, it didn't, but I had taken my dinner out with me. The dinner consisted of cold meat sandwiches, baps, brown bread, cheese and tomatoes, with a bottle of Worthington. To entertain myself during

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the orgy I had a book—a very nice book, all about a murder committed in this part of the country. *Sir John Magill's Last Journey*, by one Mr. Crofts. You should read it. The police in that book called in Scotland Yard to solve their problems for them."

Sir Maxwell took this information without wincing, and merely demanded:

"Did you then return to Gatehouse?"

"I did not. I went on to Tongland."

"Passing through Kirkcudbright?"

"Not being in an aeroplane, obviously I had to pass through Kirkcudbright."

"I mean, at what time?"

"At about 8 o'clock."

"Did anybody see you?"

"I have no doubt they did. It is my experience that one never passes through Kirkcudbright or anywhere else without being seen by at least half a dozen people."

"You did not stop at all?"

"I did not."

"You went on to Tongland. And there?"

"I fished. Total bag, one trout, three-quarters of a pound, one ditto, seven ounces, and three that were too young to leave home."

"Did you see anybody there?"

"I don't know that I did. The keeper knows me, but he wasn't there. But I daresay some busybody or other noticed me."

"When did you leave Tongland?"

"Round about 11 o'clock, I think. The fish seemed to have lost enthusiasm, and so did I."

"And then?"

"Then I went home like a good little boy. I got back some time round about midnight."

"You could produce witnesses to that, of course?"

"Of course. My wife and my servant. But naturally they would swear to anything I told them to swear to."

"No doubt," said Sir Maxwell, unmoved by this sarcasm.

"What then?"

"I went out again in the car."

"Why?"

"To look for Farren."

"What made you do that?"

"I found a note from him waiting for me."

"Have you still got that note?"

"No, I burnt it."

"What was in it?"

"He told me that he was going to commit suicide. I thought I ought to follow him and stop him."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"No, but I thought he would probably go up into the hills by Creetown. We had sometimes discussed the question of suicide, and the old mines up there seemed to have a kind of attraction for him."

"I see. You went straight over to Creetown?"

"Yes."

"Are you quite sure, Mr. Strachan?"

"Yes, of course."

Sir Maxwell was a cautious man, but there was something guarded in Strachan's tone which warned him that this was a lie, and a sudden illumination moved him to risk a bluff.

"Then you would be very much surprised if I told you that your car had been seen on the road between the Anwoth Hotel and Standing Stone Pool between midnight and 12.30?"

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Strachan was obviously not prepared for this.

"Yes," he said, "I should be surprised."

"It is surprising," rejoined the Chief Constable, "but, as you say, there is always some busybody about. Anyway, now that you are reminded of it, you do recollect going in that direction?"

"Well, yes. I had forgotten about it for the moment; I went—I thought——"

"You went to Campbell's house, Mr. Strachan. As a matter of fact, you were seen there. Why did you go?"

"I thought possibly I might find Farren there."

"Why?"

"Oh, well—he didn't like Campbell very much, and I thought—it struck me as just possible that he might have had the idea of getting an explanation or something from Campbell."

"That was an odd thing for you to think, was it not?"

"Not very. After all, it's no good pretending that Campbell and he were on good terms. They had had a quarrel that evening——"

"Yes, but you didn't know that at the time, Mr. Strachan. You tell me that you went straight through from Balmae to Tongland without stopping or speaking to anybody in Kirkcudbright."

"No, that's true. But of course, if Farren wanted to commit suicide, I could put two and two together."

"I see. It was just a guess. There was nothing in Mr. Farren's note to suggest that he might be going to see Mr. Campbell?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Mr. Strachan, I must warn you that if you persist in concealing the truth, you may involve yourself in very serious trouble. We know the contents of the note."

"Oh!" Strachan shrugged his shoulders. "If you know, why ask me?"

"We are asking you for independent corroboration, Mr. Strachan, and I must say that you are making things very difficult for Mr. Farren and for us by this attitude."

"Well, if Farren has told you — Very well, then, the note did mention Campbell, and I went along to see if Farren was there, and, if not, to warn Campbell."

"To warn him? You took Mr. Farren's threats very seriously, then?"

"Well, not very seriously. But they are both excitable men, and I thought that there might be a great deal of unpleasantness if they met in that mood, and possibly a really nasty row."

"Did you deliver the warning?"

"The house was empty. I knocked two or three times and then, as everything was dark, I went in."

"The door was open, then?"

"No, but I knew where to find the key."

"Was that a thing everybody knew?"

"How should I know? I only knew that I'd often seen Campbell hang it up, after locking the door, on a particular nail hidden behind the gutter-spout."

"I see. So you went in?"

"Yes. Everything was quite clean and tidy and it didn't look as though Campbell had been in. There were no supper-dishes or anything about, and he wasn't in bed, because I went upstairs to see. I left a note for him on the table and came away again, relocking the door and putting the key back where I found it."

Only by a great effort of self-control did the Chief Constable keep from showing the staggering effect of this piece of news. He succeeded in asking, in matter-of-fact tones:

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"What exactly did you say in the note?" As Strachan seemed to hesitate, he added, with more assurance than he felt:

"Try to make your recollection more precise this time, Mr. Strachan. As you see, we are sometimes able to check these items."

"Yes," said Strachan, coolly. "As a matter of fact, I've been rather wondering why I haven't heard about the note before."

"Have you? Didn't you take it for granted that Campbell had received it and destroyed it?"

"I did at first," said Strachan, "and that was why I thought all this fuss about Monday night so unnecessary. If Campbell came in after I was there, then he was alive long after I saw him. He had his breakfast, didn't he? At least, I understood so—and I supposed he had seen the note then and got rid of it."

"But you don't think that now?"

"Well, if you've got the note, he obviously didn't. And if you'd found it on his dead body, you'd surely have mentioned it before this."

"I did not say," said Sir Maxwell, patiently, "*when* the note had come into our possession."

For some reason, this remark appeared to unnerve Strachan, and he remained silent.

"Well now," said the Chief Constable, "do you mind telling me what was in the note? You have had plenty of time to think it over."

"To invent something, you mean? Well, I'm not going to invent, but I can't undertake to remember it word for word. I think I said something like this: 'Dear Campbell,—I am rather anxious about F. He is in a highly-wrought-up state and is threatening to do you some injury. However much he

may have to complain of your behaviour—and you know best about this—I think it advisable to put you on your guard.' It was something like that, and I signed it with my initials."

"You thought it worth while to write that note about a friend of yours to a man you personally disliked—and you still say you did not take Farren's threats seriously?"

"Well, you never know. I was thinking more of Farren than of Campbell. I didn't want him to get into trouble—an action for assault, or anything of that kind."

"It still seems to me a fairly strong step to take, Mr. Strachan. How often had Farren seriously threatened to harm Campbell?"

"He had occasionally expressed himself in rather a reckless manner."

"Had he ever attacked him?"

"N—no. There was a slight fuss once ——"

"I seem to remember hearing something about a quarrel—about six months ago, was it?"

"About that. But it didn't amount to anything."

"In any case, you thought the matter of enough importance to write that note to a man as notoriously indiscreet and fiery-tempered as Campbell. That speaks for itself, doesn't it? What happened next?"

"I went up to Creetown in my car and turned off up the hill road. I left the car where the road ends just beyond Falbae, and went along on foot calling Farren as I went. There was no moon, but it was starlight and I had my torch with me. I know that road pretty well. At least, it isn't a road, but a sort of shepherd's path. When I got close to the old mines I began searching about carefully. Presently I thought I saw something move and I shouted again. Then I saw that there really was a man there. He ran away and

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I followed him and caught him up. I said, ' My God, Farren, is that you? ' and he said, ' What the hell do you want? ' So I caught hold of him."

" Was it Farren? "

Strachan seemed to hesitate again, but finally replied, " Yes, it was."

" Well? "

" Well, I argued with him for some time and tried to persuade him to come home. He absolutely refused and started to move off again. I took him by the arm, but he struggled with me and in the confusion he hit me in the face and knocked me down. By the time I had scrambled up again he had got away from me, and I could hear him scrambling over some stones in the distance. I ran after him. It was pretty dark, of course, but the sky was quite clear and one could see moving objects like lumps of grey shadow. I caught glimpses of him now and again when he came up on the sky-line. You know that place—all dips and hillocks. I was getting pretty well winded and I was thinking about him and didn't look where I was going. I tripped over a bunch of stuff and found myself falling head-first—over the edge of the world, it seemed to me. I bumped and banged against what felt like baulks of timber, and finally brought up against something. I was completely knocked out of course. Anyhow, when I came to my senses I found myself at the bottom of a pretty deep place with black darkness rising up all round me and a patch of starlight at the top. I felt round very cautiously and tried to get up, but the moment I was on my feet, I went all sick and giddy and lost consciousness again. I don't know how long that lasted. It must have been a good many hours, because when I came to myself again it was broad daylight, and I was able to see where I was."

"One of the old shafts, I suppose."

"Yes. Lord! it was a place! I don't suppose it was more than forty feet deep, but that looked quite enough to me, and it went sheer up like a chimney, with a little square of light twinkling away at the top; it seemed a mile off. It was narrow, fortunately. By spread-eagling myself I could get a grip on the sides and hoist myself painfully up by inches, but it was slow work, and my head was so swimmy and my legs so weak that I simply tumbled down again after the first two or three attempts. I yelled and yelled, hoping against hope that somebody might hear me, but the place was as silent as the grave. I was extraordinarily lucky not to have broken a leg or an arm. If I had, I suppose I should have been down there now."

"No," said the Chief Constable. "We should have brought you up on Friday or Saturday."

"Ah!—well, by that time I don't suppose I should have been in any condition to worry about it. Well, after resting a bit more I got my head and legs under better control, and gradually wormed my way up. It was a slow job, because the sides were smooth and didn't give much foothold or handhold, and sometimes I'd lose purchase and slip down a few feet. Fortunately there were horizontal beams across the sides at intervals, and I was able to catch on to them and give myself a bit of a breather from time to time. I kept on hoping that the people at the farm would find my car and come to look for me, but if they did see it, they probably thought I was fishing or picnicking somewhere and attached no importance to it. I clawed my way up—happily I'm on the tall and hefty side—and at last—God! it was a relief—I found myself at the top and hooked an arm out on to the blessed grass. There was an awful tussle with that last foot or so—I thought I should never heave myself over the edge,

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but I managed it somehow. I dragged my legs out after me, feeling as though they were made of solid lead, and then I just rolled over and lay gasping. Ugh! ”

Strachan paused, and the Chief Constable congratulated him.

“ Well, I lay there for a bit. It was a gorgeous day, very windy and sunny, and I tell you that the world looked good to me for a bit. I was quivering like a blanc-mange, and hungry and thirsty—ye gods! ”

“ What time do you think that was? ”

“ I couldn't be sure, because my watch had stopped. It's a wrist-watch, and must have got a bump in the fall. I rested a bit—half an hour, perhaps—and then I pulled myself together and tried to find out where I was. The mines are scattered about a good bit, and I couldn't recognise the place. However, presently I found a burn and had a drink and stuck my head in the water. After that I felt better, only I discovered that I'd collected a magnificent black eye when Farren punched me in the face, and of course I was wrenched and bruised from head to foot. The back of my head still has a lump on it like an egg; I suppose that was what knocked me out. The next thing was to find the car. I calculated that I must be nearly two miles from Falbae, and decided that if I followed the flow of the burn, I must be going in the right direction, so I set off downstream. It was damned hot, and I'd lost my hat. Did you find it, by the way? ”

“ Yes, but we didn't know what to make of it. It must have got knocked off in your rough-and-tumble with Farren, and at first we thought it was his, but Mrs. Farren said it wasn't, so we didn't know quite what to think.”

“ Well, now you know. The fact that you found it there ought to prove my story pretty well, don't you think? ”

The Chief Constable had been thinking that very thing, but at the sharply triumphant note in Strachan's voice, a doubt shot through him. What would have been easier than to drop a hat at a suitable place, any time between Tuesday and Friday, as a foundation for this highly dramatic story?

"Never mind what I think, Mr. Strachan," said he. "Go on. What did you do next?"

"Well, I kept on down the burn, and after a time I came in sight of the road and the car. It was just where I had left it, and the dashboard clock made it a quarter past twelve."

"Didn't you see anybody on the way back?"

"Well, yes—I did see one man. But I—well, I lay doggo till he had passed."

"Why?"

Strachan looked rather uncomfortable.

"Because—well, because I wasn't exactly ready to answer questions. I didn't know what had become of Farren. I realised that it looked as though I'd been in the wars, and if Farren's body was going to be found down a hole or anything it might look rather queer for me."

"But surely——"

"Yes, I know just what you're going to say. But surely, if I thought that, I ought to have told somebody and got a search-party going. But don't you see, it was perfectly possible that Farren had come to his senses and gone quietly home. It would have been perfectly idiotic to start a rum-pus and make a scandal all about nothing. It seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to get back quietly and find out what really had happened. I had a beast of a time starting up the car. I'd left the lights on the night before, with the idea of finding it again, and the batteries had run down. I had to swing her over with the starting-handle, and it was heavy work. Those Chrysler 70's have rather a big

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engine. Still, I managed to get her going after about a quarter of an hour——”

“Surely you could have got help from the farm.”

Strachan made a gesture of impatience.

“Haven’t I told you that I didn’t want to attract attention? As a matter of fact, I was afraid all the time that somebody would hear me and come up to see what was happening. But they didn’t. Probably they were all at their dinner. I had an old cap and a motoring coat in the car, so I tidied myself up as best I could, and got on to the back road—the one through Knockeans. It crosses the Skyre Burn just beyond Glen and comes out by Anwoth Auld Kirk. I got back home about half-past one.”

The Chief Constable nodded.

“Was your family alarmed by your being out all night?”

“No. I forgot to say that when I got Farren’s note I ran up and told my wife that I’d been called away and that I didn’t want anything said about it.”

“I see. What did you do when you got home?”

“I rang up the McClellan Arms in Kirkcudbright and asked them kindly to send a message up to the Farrens to say, would Mr. Farren ring me up about a fishing appointment. The call came through in about half an hour’s time, when I’d had a bath and felt rather better. Mrs. Farren had come down and said Hugh wasn’t at home and could she take a message? I told her to say absolutely nothing to anybody for the moment, but that I would come over and see her after lunch, as I had something rather important to tell her. She gave a bit of a gasp, and I said, had Hugh come home last night, and to answer only yes or no. She said, No. And I said, Had there been any sort of trouble with Campbell? and she said, Yes. So I told her to say nothing about that either, and I would come over as soon as I could.”

"How much did you tell your wife about all this?"

"Only that Farren had got himself into a state of mind and left home, and that she was on no account to say anything to anyone about it, or about my having come home so late and in such a pickle. When I'd made myself reasonably presentable, I had some lunch. I needed it by that time."

"I expect you did. Did you, in fact, go over to Kirkcudbright afterwards?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why not?"

There was something about the Chief Constable's dogged "Why?" and "Why not?" that was irritating as well as disquieting. Strachan shifted awkwardly in his seat.

"I changed my mind about it."

"Why?"

"I was going to go, of course." Strachan appeared to lose the scent for a moment and then went off on a fresh cast.

"We dine in the middle of the day on account of my little girl. We had roast jiggot of mutton. It wasn't ready till past two o'clock. That was later than our usual time, of course, but they'd kept it back with the idea that I might turn up. I wanted that mutton, and I didn't want to appear unusual before the servant. So we took our time over dinner and hadn't finished till nearly three. About a quarter past three it would be before I was ready to start. I went down to open the gate for the car. I saw Tom Clark coming down from the golf-course. Just opposite my gate he met the Gatehouse policeman. They didn't see me, because of the hedge."

The Chief Constable made no comment. Strachan swallowed hard and continued.

"The constable said, 'Is the Provost up at the golf-course?' Clark said, 'Ay, he is that.' The constable said, 'He's wanted. Mr. Campbell's been found lying dead at

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Newton-Stewart.' After that they moved farther up the road, and I didn't hear any more. So I went back to the house to think about it."

"What did you think about it?"

"I couldn't make up my mind what to think about it. I couldn't see how it was going to affect me. But I didn't feel that it was quite the moment to go up to the Farrens'. It might cause comment. At any rate, I wanted time to consider."

"Was that the first you had heard about Campbell?"

"Of course it was. Why, the news had only just come through."

"Did it surprise you?"

"Naturally."

"But you didn't rush out as anybody else would have done and demand details?"

"No."

"Why?"

"What the devil do you mean, why? I didn't, that's all."

"I see. When Lord Peter Wimsey called later in the evening, you still hadn't been over to Kirkcudbright?"

"No."

"He brought the news of Campbell's death to your wife. Had she heard about it before?"

"No. I didn't know any particulars and I thought it better not to mention it."

"Did you tell Lord Peter that you knew about it already?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I thought my wife would think it odd that I'd said nothing about it to her."

"Was anything said about your black eye?"

" Yes. I gave a—er—a fictitious explanation."

" Why? "

" I didn't see what business it was of Wimsey's."

" And what did your wife think of that explanation? "

" I don't see what business that is of yours."

" Were you at that time of the opinion that Farren had committed a murder? "

" There wasn't any question of murder at that time."

" Precisely, Mr. Strachan. That is what makes your behaviour appear so odd. You went over and saw Mrs. Farren late that night? "

" I did."

" What did you say to her? "

" I told her the events of the previous night."

" Was that all? You did not, for example, say that you expected a charge of murder to be preferred against Farren and that she was to be very careful what she said to the police? "

Strachan's eyes narrowed.

" Isn't that one of those questions which you are not supposed to ask, nor I to answer? "

" Have it your own way, Mr. Strachan." The Chief Constable got up. " You seem to be well acquainted with the law. You know, for example, that an accessory to murder after the fact is liable to the same punishment as the principal? "

" Certainly I do, Sir Maxwell. I also know that you are not allowed to use threats, either overt or implicit, in interrogating a witness. Is there anything further I can do for you? "

" Nothing, thank you," replied the Chief Constable, politely.

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Indeed, he thought, as he drove back to Kirkcudbright, Strachan had done quite enough. If the story about the note left on Campbell's table were true—and he was inclined to believe it—then Strachan had shattered the whole elaborate theory that the police had been building up. For what it meant was clearly this. Either Campbell had been alive after Strachan's visit—in which case there had been no murder on the Gatehouse-Kirkcudbright road—or else some other person, hitherto unknown, had entered the cottage after midnight, and that person was undoubtedly the murderer.

There was, of course, the possibility that there never had been any note, and that Strachan had found Campbell at home and killed him. This agreed with Ferguson's evidence. But in that case, why invent the tale about the note at all, unless to throw suspicion on Farren? That was ridiculous, because the only reasonable explanation of Strachan's conduct otherwise was that he was either shielding Farren or in league with him.

Some other person—some other person. Who could that be? So far, Ferguson's story had been amply borne out. The first arrival of the car with the body, the second arrival of Strachan—if a third person had arrived, how unfortunate that Ferguson should not have heard him come! Ferguson ——

Ferguson.

Yes, well, what about Ferguson?

He, of all people, could have entered Campbell's cottage unnoticed. He had only to walk round and open the door with that convenient key, which he must have seen Campbell hide a hundred times.

But then, that was absurd. Not only had Ferguson got an alibi—the Chief Constable did not set any undue value on alibis—but this theory left one huge question unanswered.

Where had Campbell been when Strachan came in? If Strachan had found him there, why should he not have said so?

Suppose Strachan had found Campbell lying there dead—killed by Ferguson at some earlier moment. What then? Was Strachan in league with Ferguson?

Here was a real idea at last. All their difficulties had arisen from supposing that only one artist had been concerned in the crime. Ferguson could have committed the murder and established an alibi by going to Glasgow, while Strachan remained behind to concoct the faked accident and paint the picture.

All that story about fighting Farren and tumbling down a mine was very thin. Strachan had been up at Newton-Stewart all that time. His return by the by-road between Creetown and Anwoth Kirk could probably be proved, and agreed reasonably well with the time necessary for taking the body to the Minnoch, painting the picture and making his escape.

Only—why bring Farren into it? Could Strachan not have invented some better excuse for being out all night than one which involved his best friend? One, too, which was so suspicious in itself? It argued a degree of cold-blooded villainy that one would hardly expect from Strachan.

A clever fellow, though. One who saw the drift of your questions before you asked them. A keen, canny, cautious devil. A man who could think a plan like this out beforehand.

Clever, to think of taking that hat up to Falbae and leaving it there on the edge of the mine-shaft. But he had shown his triumph a bit too openly there.

The Chief Constable felt more satisfied than he had done for some time. He unbent so far as to go and look for Wimsey, to tell him all about it. But Wimsey was not at home.

CHAPTER XXII

GRAHAM'S STORY

"I DO WISH, WIMSEY," SAID WATERS, IRRITABLY, "YOU would get something to do. Why not go fishing, or take the car out for a run? I can't paint properly with you snooping round all the time. It puts me off my stroke."

"I'm sorry," said Wimsey. "It fascinates me. I think the most joyous thing in life is to loaf round and watch another bloke doing a job of work. Look how popular the men are who dig up London with electric drills. Duke's son, cook's son, son of a hundred kings—people will stand there for hours on end, with their ear-drums splitting—why? Simply for the pleasure of being idle while other people work."

"Very likely," said Waters. "But the row fortunately prevents them from hearing the workmen's comments on their behaviour. How would you like me to sit round and watch you detecting things?"

"That's different," said Wimsey. "The essence of detection is secrecy. It has no business to be spectacular. But you can watch me if you like."

"Right-ho! You run away and do some detecting, and I'll come and watch you when I've finished this panel."

"Don't disturb yourself," said Wimsey, pleasantly. "You can watch me now. There's no charge."

"Oh! are you detecting now?"

"Like anything. If you could take the top of my head off you would see the wheels whizzing round."

"I see. You're not detecting me, I hope."

"Everybody always hopes that."

Waters glanced at him sharply and uneasily, and laid his palette aside.

"Look here, Wimsey—you're not suggesting anything? I've told you all about my movements, and I suppose you believe me. The police may be excused for seeing nothing but the obvious, but I should have thought that you at least had commonsense. If I had been murdering Campbell, surely I should have taken care to provide myself with a better alibi."

"It depends on how clever you are," replied Wimsey, coolly. "You remember Poe's bit about that in *The Purloined Letter*. A very stupid murderer doesn't bother about an alibi at all. A murderer one degree cleverer says, 'If I am to escape suspicion, I must have a good alibi.' But a murderer who was cleverer still might say to himself, 'Everyone will expect the murderer to provide a first-class alibi; therefore, the better my alibi, the more they will suspect me. I will go one better still; I will provide an alibi which is obviously imperfect. Then people will say that surely, if I had been guilty, I should have provided a better alibi.' If I were a murderer myself, that is what I should do."

"Then you would probably come to a sticky end."

"Very likely; because the police might be so stupid that they never got beyond the first step in the reasoning. It's a pity about that bicycle of yours, isn't it?"

Waters took up his palette again.

"I don't want to discuss this stupid business."

"Nor do I. Go on painting. What a lot of brushes you've got. Do you use them all?"

"Oh, no!" said Waters, sarcastically. "I keep them there for swank."

"Do you always keep everything in this satchel? It's just like a woman's vanity-bag, all higgledy-piggledy."

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"I can always find things when I want them."

"Campbell used a satchel, too."

"Then that was a bond of union between us, wasn't it?"

Waters snatched the satchel, rather impatiently, out of Wimsey's hands, ferreted out a tube of rose madder, dabbed some paint on his palette, screwed up the tube and tossed it back into the bag again.

"Do you use rose madder?" said Wimsey, inquisitively.

"Some people say it's such an awkward colour."

"It's handy sometimes—if you know how to use it."

"Isn't it supposed to be rather fugitive?"

"Yes—I don't use much of it. Have you been taking an art course?"

"Something like it. Studying different methods and all that. It's very interesting. I'm sorry I never saw Campbell at work. He ——"

"For God's sake, don't keep harping on Campbell!"

"No? But I so well remember your saying that you could do a perfectly good imitation of Campbell if you liked. That was just before he was bumped off—do you remember?"

"I don't remember anything about it."

"Well, you were a bit tight at the time, and I don't suppose you meant it. There's a bit about him in the *Sunday Chronicle* this week. I've got it somewhere. Oh, yes—it says he is a great loss to the artistic world. 'His inimitable style,' it says. Still, I suppose they have to say something. 'Highly individual technique'; that's a good phrase. 'Remarkable power of vision and unique colour-sense placed him at once in the first rank.' I notice that people who die suddenly generally seem to be in the first rank."

Waters snorted.

"I know that fellow who does the *Sunday Chronicle* stuff. One of the Hambledon gang. But Hambledon *is* a painter.

Campbell took Hambledon's worst tricks and made a style out of them. I tell you ——"

The door of the studio burst open and Jock Graham tumbled in, breathless.

"I say, is Wimsey here? Sorry, Waters, but I must speak to Wimsey. No, it's all right, I don't want to take him away. Wimsey, old man, I'm in the most ghastly hole. It's too awful. Have you heard about it? It's only just been sprung upon me."

"Go to, go to," said Wimsey, "you have heard what you should not. Put on your nightgown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Campbell's dead; 'a cannot come out on's grave."

"I wish he could."

"Wake Duncan with thy knocking? I would thou couldst."

"Oh, stop drivelling, Wimsey. This really is damnable."

"O horror, horror, horror," pursued Wimsey, staggering realistically into a corner, "tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name it. Where got'st thou that goose-look?"

"Goose is right enough," said Graham. "That's exactly what I'm looking like just now."

"Geese are made to be plucked," said Wimsey, eyeing him shrewdly, "and so are you."

"Was that a lucky shot, or did you mean it?"

"What is all this about?" asked Waters, peevishly.

"I don't mind you knowing," said Graham. "It'll be all over the county in half a moment if something isn't done about it. My God!" He wiped his forehead and dropped heavily into the nearest chair.

"Well, well," said Wimsey.

"Listen! You know all this fuss there is about Campbell. That constable fellow, Duncan ——"

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"I told you Duncan came into it somewhere."

"Shut up! That fool came asking questions about where I'd been on Tuesday and so on. I never took the thing seriously, you know. I told him to run away and play. Then something got into the papers——"

"I know, I know," said Wimsey. "We can take that part as read."

"All right. Well—you know that female at Newton-Stewart—the Smith-Lemesurier woman?"

"I have met her."

"God! so have I. She got hold of me this morning——"

"Jock! Jock!"

"I couldn't make out what she was driving at first of all. She hinted and smiled and languished at me and said that whatever I had done wouldn't make any difference to her friendship, and talked about honour and sacrifice and God knows what, till finally I had almost to shake it out of her. Do you know what she's done?"

"Oh, yes," said Wimsey, cheerfully. "All is known. A lady's reputation has been sacrificed on the altar of affection. But, dear old boy, we do not blame you. We know that, rather than compromise a noble woman, you would have gone to the scaffold with your lips locked in a chivalrous silence. I do not know which is the nobler soul—the woman who without a thought of self—I seem to be dropping into blank verse."

"My dear Wimsey, don't say you ever thought for one moment that there was a word of truth in it."

"Frankly, I never did. I have known you do many rash things, but I gave you credit for seeing through Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier."

"I should hope so. But what on earth am I to do?"

"It's awkward," said Wimsey, "it's awkward. Short of

admitting where you really were that night, there is nothing for it but to accept the sacrifice, and with the sacrifice, the lady. And I greatly fear the lady means matrimony. Still, that's a thing that overtakes most of us, and most of us survive it."

"It's blackmail," groaned Graham. "And after all, what have I done to deserve it? I tell you that beyond a passing compliment or so I've never—dash it all!"

"Not so much as a squeeze of the hand?"

"Well, possibly a squeeze of the hand. I mean to say, hang it, one must be civil."

"Or a kiss or so—meaning no harm?"

"No, no, Wimsey. I never went as far as that. I may be a bad lad, but I have some instincts of self-protection. No, really."

"Well, never mind," said Wimsey, consolingly. "Perhaps the love will come after marriage. When you look at her over the coffee-pot and say to yourself, 'To this noble woman's pure affection I owe my life and freedom,' your heart will reproach you for your coldness."

"Life and freedom be damned! Don't be a fool. Just imagine how frightful it was. I had to be absolutely brutal before I could get away."

"Did you repulse the dear little woman?"

"Yes, I did. I told her not to be a damned idiot, and she burst into tears. It's appalling. What those people there will think——"

"What people where?"

"At the hotel. She walked in there and asked for me, and I left her howling on the drawing-room sofa. God knows what she's telling people! I ought to have seen her off the premises, but I—my God, Wimsey, she frightened me. I fled for my life. People ought to be had up for making scenes

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in public places. That old padre who's staying there barged in in the middle, just as the waterworks were in full play. I'll have to leave the place! "

" You don't seem to have played your cards very well."

" I shall have to go and make it right with the police, of course. But what's the good? Nobody will ever believe that there wasn't something in it."

" How true that is! What are you going to say to the police? "

" Oh, I shall have to tell them where I was. That part's O.K. But don't you see that the mere fact of that woman's having trotted out that tale will be proof enough that I'd given cause for it? She's absolutely got me taped, old man. Scotland isn't big enough to hold both of us. I shall have to go to Italy or somewhere. The more I prove that story to be a lie, the more obvious it will be that she couldn't have told such a lie unless we were on terms of the most damnable intimacy."

" Isn't life difficult? " said Wimsey. " It all shows how careful one should be to tell the police everything at the first possible moment. Had you only been frank with that zealous young constable, all this would have been avoided."

" I know, but I didn't want to get anybody into trouble. You see, Wimsey, the fact is, I was out poaching with Jimmy Fleeming, up at Bargrennan. I thought it would be good fun. We were netting the pool just below the fall."

" Oh, were you? That's the Earl of Galloway's water."

" Yes. We were out all Monday night. We had a damn good time, only I had more whiskey than was good for me. But that's by the way. There's a little sort of hut-place up there. It belongs to one of the men on the estate. We camped there. I wasn't feeling altogether so good on the Tuesday, so I stayed up there and on Tuesday night we had another

go at it, because Monday had produced more fun than fish. We did rather well on Tuesday. Some of these fellows are damn good sorts. I get a lot more kick out of that crowd than I do out of what's called our own class. Jimmy Fleeming has an amazing collection of good stories. And the side-lights you get on the lives of respectable citizens! Besides, men like that know a damn sight more than ordinary educated people. What they don't know about fish, flesh and fowl isn't worth knowing. And they're all damn good friends of mine. It makes me sick to think of giving them away to the police."

"You are an ass, Graham," said Wimsey. "Why the hell didn't you come and tell me about it in the first place?"

"You'd have had to tell the police."

"Oh, I know—but that could have been squared. Are these fellows prepared to give evidence now?"

"I haven't said anything to them. How could I? Dash it, I'm not such a swine as to go and ask them. I've no doubt they'd back me up, but I can't ask them to. It isn't done."

"The best thing you can do," said Wimsey, "is to go straight to Sir Maxwell Jamieson and cough it all up. He's very decent, and I bet he'll see that your friends don't suffer. By the way, you're sure they can answer for you on Tuesday as well as Monday night?"

"Oh, yes, Jimmy and another bloke were hanging round most of Tuesday morning off and on. But that doesn't matter a damn. The thing I want to get clear is this business about Monday night."

"I know. But Tuesday morning is what's going to interest the police."

"Good Lord, Wimsey—this rot about Campbell isn't serious, really?"

"That's what I say," struck in Waters, grimly. "We seem

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to be in the same boat, Graham. I am supposed to have faked an alibi, suborned my friends and played merry hell generally. As far as I can see, Wimsey, Graham is just as clever a murderer as I am. However, no doubt you are the super-detective who can see through both of us. We can't both be guilty, anyhow."

"Why not?" said Wimsey. "You may be accomplices for all I know. Of course, that makes you not quite so clever, because the best murderers don't have accomplices, but one can't always expect perfection."

"But really and truly, Wimsey, what is the evidence about the murder, if it is one? Everybody seems to be full of mysterious hints, but you can't get out of anybody why it is murder, or when it is supposed to have happened, or what it was done with or why, or anything about it—except, according to the papers, that it was done by an artist. What's the point? Did the assassin leave his finger-prints behind in paint, or what?"

"I can't tell you," said Wimsey. "But I don't mind saying this, that the whole thing turns upon how quickly Campbell could have got that sketch done. If I could have had that painting-party we planned ——"

"By Jove, yes! We never did that stunt," said Graham.

"Look here, let's do it now," said Wimsey. "Both you and Waters claim to be able to imitate Campbell's style. Start off now and do something and I'll time you. Half a jiff! I'll run round to the police-station and borrow the sketch for you to copy. It won't be quite the same thing, but it will give us an idea."

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Inspector Macpherson released the canvas without demur, but without enthusiasm. He seemed, indeed, so much de-

pressed that Wimsey paused to ask what was the matter with him.

"Maitter eneugh," said Macpherson. "We've found a mon that saw Campbell's car goin' up tae the Minnoch on Tuesday mornin', an' the time-table's a' went tae hell."

"No!" said Wimsey.

"Ay. There's yin o' the men as is workin' at the road-mendin' on the Newton-Stewart road, an' he saw the car wi' Campbell in 't—that'll be the pairson that was got up tae luik like Campbell—pass the New Galloway turnin' on the road betune Creetoon and Newton-Stewart at five an' twenty meenuts tae ten. He disna ken Campbell, but he described the car an' the hat and cloak, an' he tuk partee-cular notice o't because it was goin' fast an' nearly ran him doon as he was comin' away on his bicycle tae deliver a message for the foreman."

"Five-and-twenty to ten," said Wimsey, thoughtfully. "That's a bit on the late side."

"Ay. We was calculatin' on him startin' oot at 7.30 fra' Gatehouse."

"Oh, I don't mind that," said Wimsey. "He must have cleared off before Mrs. Green came, and parked the body somehow, though why he should have taken such a risk I don't know. It's the other end of the business that's worryin' me. At that rate he wouldn't be up at the Minnoch much before ten. We reckoned that to catch the train at Girvan, he'd have to start off again at about 11.10. He'd have to be pretty quick with his picture."

"That's so, he would that. But there's more to it. We've found a man that passed yon bicyclist on the way tae Girvan, an' it's juist impossible that he could have caught the train at all!"

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"Don't be ridiculous," said Wimsey, "he must have caught it, because he did catch it."

"That's so, but it must ha' been anither man a'tegither."

"Well, then," said Wimsey. "If it was another man altogether it wasn't our man at all. Do be logical."

The Inspector shook his head, just as a constable knocked at the door and, putting his head in, announced that Sergeant Dalziel was here with Mr. Clarence Gordon to see the Inspector.

"Here's the verra man," said Macpherson. "Ye'd better wait an' see what he has to say."

Mr. Clarence Gordon was a stout little gentleman with a pronounced facial angle, who pulled his hat off in a hurry at the sight of Wimsey.

"Be covered, be covered," said that gentleman, graciously. "I fancy you may be asked to make a sworn statement."

Mr. Gordon spread out his hands deprecatingly.

"I am thure," he said, pleasantly, "that I thall be only too willing to athiht the polithe in any way and to thwear to vat ith nethethary. But I athk you, gentlemen, to take into conthiderathon the interrupthion to my bithneth. I have come from Glathgow at conthiderable inconvenienth——"

"Of course, of course, Mr. Gordon," said the Inspector. "It's verra gude of ye."

Mr. Gordon sat down, and, spreading the four fat fingers of his left hand upon his knee, so as to display to full advantage a handsome ruby ring, raised his right hand, by way of adding emphasis to his statement and began:

"My name ith Clarenth Gordon. I am a commerthial traveller for the firm of Moth & Gordon, Glathgow—ladieth' dretheth and hothiery. Here ith my card. I travel thith dithtrict on alternate Mondayth, thpending the night at Newton-Thtewart and returning on Tuethday afternoonh

by the Bargrennan road to Girvan and Ayr where I have many good cuthtomerth. Latht Tuethday week I thtartet from Newton-Thtewart in my limouthine ath uthual after an early lunth. I patht Barrhill at a little after half-patht twelve. I remember theeing the train go out of the thtathion jutht before I got there. That ith how I know the time. I had patht through the village when I thaw a bithyclitht in a grey thuit riding very fatht along the road in front of me. I thay to mythelf: 'There ith a man in a great hurry in the middle of the road—I mutht blow my horn loudly.' He ith vobbling from thide to thide, you underthtand, with hith head down. I thay to mythelf again, 'If he ith not careful, he will have an acthidient.' I blow very loud, and he hearth me, and drawth to the thide of the road. I path him, and I thee hith fathe very vite. That ith all. I do not thee him again, and he ith the only bithyclitht I thee on all that road till I get to Girvan."

"Half-past twelve," said Wimsey. "No—later—the train leaves Barrhill at 12.35. You're right, Inspector, that can't be our man. It's twelve miles, good, from Barrhill to Girvan, and the man with the grey suit—*our* man, I mean—was there at 1.7. I don't think he could possibly do it. Even a good bicyclist could hardly manage twenty-four miles an hour over twelve miles along that road—not on the Anwoth Hotel bicycle, anyhow. You would want a trained man on a racing machine. You are quite sure, Mr. Gordon, that you didn't pass another bicyclist further along the road?"

"Not a tholitary one," replied Mr. Gordon, earnestly, raising all his fingers protestingly and sawing the air, "not a thingle thoul on a bithycle at all. I thould have notithed it, becauth I am a very careful driver, and I do not like puth-thycliththt. No, I thee nobody. I take no notith of thith man at the time, of courthe. But on Thunday my vife

tellth me, 'Clarenth, there wath a call come through on the vireleth for travellerth by the Bargrennan road to thay if they thaw a bithyclitht latht Tuethday week. Did you hear it?' I thay, 'No, I am travelling all the week and I cannot alwayth be lithening to the vireleth.' Vell, my wife tellth me what it ith, and I thay, 'Vell, when I have time I go to tell the polithe what I have theen. And here I am. It ith very inconvenient and not good for bithneth, but it ith my duty ath a thitithen. I tell my firm—the both ith my brother—and he thay, 'Clarenth, you mutht tell the polithe. It cannot be helped.' Tho I came, and here I am and that ith all I know."

"Thank you verra much, Mr. Gordon; ye have given us some valuable information an' we're much obliged tae ye. Now, there's juist one other thing. Could ye tell us if the man ye saw is one o' these, sir?"

The Inspector spread the six photographs out on the table, and Mr. Clarence Gordon bent dubiously over them.

"I hardly thaw the man, you know," he said, "and he vore thpectacleth, and there ith no photo here with thpectacleth. I do not think it wath thith one, though." He set Strachan's photograph aside. "That man hath a military look, and I thould thay he vould be a big, heavy man. Thith wath not a very big man, the man I thaw. And he did not have a beard. Now *thith* man"—Mr. Gordon gazed at the photograph of Graham very intently—"thith man hath very remarkable eyeth, but with thpectacleth he might be anybody. You thee? Thpectacleth vould be a good dithguithe for him. Thith one it might be altho, but he hath a mouth-tathe—I cannot remember if the man I thaw had one. It wath not a big one, if he had. Thith might be he and tho might thith or thith. No, I cannot tell."

"Never mind, Mr. Gordon, ye have done verra weel, an' we're greatly obliged to ye."

"I may go now? I have my bithneth to conthider."

The Inspector released him and turned to Wimsey.

"Not Strachan and not Gowan," he said. "Gowan's a verra big man."

"Not the murderer at all, apparently," said Wimsey. "Another red herring, Inspector."

"The place is fair lousy wi' red herrings," mourned Inspector Macpherson. "But it's a miracle to me that yon bicycle should ha' got itself tae Euston an' have no connection wi' the crime. It's no reasonable. Where did the Girvan man come from? And he had the grey suit and the spectacles an' a'. But—twelve miles in thirty minutes—I'm wonderin' could it no be done after all? If ony of our men was trained as an athlete ——"

"Try *Who's Who*," suggested Wimsey—"it may throw some light on their hideous pasts. I must run away now. I've got two artists straining at the leash. Cry havoc! and let slip the dogs of war. It's curious how blank verse seems to come natural to me to-day. It just shows how blank my mind is, I suppose."

.

On returning he found that Waters had supplied Graham with canvas, palette, knife and brushes and was arguing cheerfully with him about the rival merits of two different kinds of sketching easel.

Wimsey stood Campbell's sketch up on the table before them.

"Oh, that's the subject, is it?" said Graham. "H'm. Very characteristic. Almost ultra-characteristic, don't you think, Waters?"

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"That's exactly what one expects from the Campbells of this world," said Waters. "The trick degenerates into a mannerism, and they paint caricatures of their own style. As a matter of fact, it's apt to happen to anybody. Even Corot, for instance. I went to a Corot exhibition once, and 'pon my soul, after seeing a hundred or so Corots gathered together, I began to have my doubts. And he *was* a master."

Graham picked the canvas up and carried it across to the light. He frowned and rubbed the surface with a thoughtful thumb.

"Funny," he said, "the handling isn't altogether . . . How many people have seen this, Wimsey?"

"Only myself and the police, so far. And the Fiscal, naturally."

"Ah!—well! Do you know, I should have said—if I didn't know what it was ——"

"Well?"

"I should almost have thought I had done it myself. There's a slight flavour of pastiche about it. And there's a sort of—just look at those stones in the burn, Waters, and the shadow under the bridge. It's rather more cold and cobalt than Campbell's usual style." He held it away at arm's length. "Looks as though he'd been experimenting. There's a lack of freedom about it, somehow. Don't you think so?"

Waters came up and stared over his shoulder.

"Oh, I don't know, Graham. Yes, I see what you mean. It looks a bit fumbled here and there. No, not quite that. A little tentative. That's not the word, either. Insincere. But that's exactly what I complain of in all Campbell's stuff. It makes its effect all right, but when you come to look into it, it doesn't stand up to inspection. I call that a thoroughly Campbellish piece of work. A poor Campbell, if you like, but full of Campbellisms."

"I know," said Graham. "It reminds me of what the good lady said about *Hamlet*—that it was all quotations."

"G. K. Chesterton says," put in Wimsey, "that most people with a very well-defined style write at times what look like bad parodies of themselves. He mentions Swinburne, for instance—that bit about 'From the lilies and languors of virtue to the raptures and roses of vice.' I expect painters do the same. But of course I don't know a thing about it."

Graham looked at him, opened his mouth to speak, and shut it again.

"Well, chuck it here," said Waters. "If we've got to copy the beastly thing, we'd better start. Can you see all right there? I'll put the paints on the table here. And please don't throw them on the floor in your usual dirty way."

"I don't," said Graham, indignantly. "I collect them neatly in my hat, if I'm not wearing it, and if I am, I lay them handily in the grass. I'm not always fumbling about for them in a satchel among my sandwiches. It's a miracle to me that you don't eat your colours and put the bloater-paste on the canvas."

"I never keep sandwiches in my satchel," retorted Waters. "I put them in my pocket. The left-hand pocket. Always. You may think I'm not methodical, but I always know where to find everything. Ferguson puts tubes in his pockets, and that's why his handkerchiefs always look like paint-rags."

"That's better than going round with crumbs in your clothing," said Graham. "To say nothing of the time when Mrs. McLeod thought the drains were wrong, till she traced the stink to your old painting-coat. What was it? Liver-sausage?"

"That was an oversight. You don't expect me to go about

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like Gowan, carrying a sort of combined picnic-basket and sketching-box, with a partition for each colour and a portable kettle, do you? ”

“ Oh, Gowan? That’s pure swank. Do you remember the day I pinched his box and filled all the partitions up with wee fush? ”

“ That was a good riot,” said Waters, reminiscently. “ He couldn’t use the box for a week because of the fishy smell. And he had to stop painting, because it put him out to have his arrangements upset. Or so he said.”

“ Oh, Gowan’s a man of method,” said Graham. “ I’m like a Waterman pen—I function in any position. But he has to have everything just so. Never mind. Here I am, like a fish out of water. I don’t like your knife, I don’t like your palette and I simply loathe your easel. But you don’t imagine trifles like that are going to put me off. Not on your life. Have at it. Are you standing by with the stop-watch, Wimsey? ”

“ Yes. Are you ready? One, two, three—go! ”

“ By the way, I suppose we can’t expect you to tell us whether the object of all this is to incriminate us? I mean, do we get hanged for being quick or for being slow? ”

“ I haven’t worked it out yet,” said Wimsey, “ but I don’t mind telling you that the less you dawdle the better I shall be pleased.”

“ It’s not altogether a fair test,” said Waters, mashing up his blue and white to the colour of a morning sky. “ Copying a canvas isn’t the same thing as painting direct. It’s bound to be rather quicker.”

“ Slower,” said Graham.

“ Different, anyhow.”

“ It’s the technique that’s a nuisance,” said Graham. “ I don’t feel handy with so much knife-work.”

“ I do,” said Waters. “ I use the knife myself quite a lot.”

"I used to," said Graham, "but I've chucked it lately. I suppose we needn't follow every scratch and scrape exactly, Wimsey?"

"If you try to do that," said Waters, "it will certainly make you slower."

"I'll let you off that," said Wimsey. "I only want you to get somewhere about the same amount of paint on the canvas."

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The two men worked on in silence for some time, while Wimsey fidgeted restlessly about the studio, picking things up and putting them down and whistling tuneless fragments of Bach.

At the end of an hour, Graham was a little farther advanced than Waters, but the panel was still incomplete as compared with the model.

After another ten minutes Wimsey took up his stand behind the painters and watched them with a maddening kind of intentness. Waters fidgeted, scraped out something he had done, put it in again, cursed and said:

"I wish you'd go away."

"Nerves cracking up under the strain," commented Wimsey, dispassionately.

"What's the matter, Wimsey? Are we behind time?"

"Not quite," said Wimsey, "but very nearly."

"Well, you can reckon on another half-hour as far as I'm concerned," said Graham, "and if you flurry me it'll probably be longer still."

"Never mind, do the thing properly. Even if you upset my calculations, it doesn't matter. I shall probably be able to get round it somehow."

The half-hour dragged to an end. Graham, glancing from

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the model to the copy, said, "There, that's the best I can make of it," threw down his palette and stretched himself. Waters glanced across at his work and said, "You've beaten me on time," and painted on. He put in another fifteen minutes or so and announced that he had finished. Wimsey strolled over and examined the results. Graham and Waters rose and did likewise.

"Not bad efforts, on the whole," suggested Graham, half-shutting his eyes and retiring suddenly on to Wimsey's toes.

"You've got that stuff on the bridge very well," said Waters. "Thoroughly Campbellian."

"Your burn is better than mine and better than Campbell's, if it comes to that," replied Graham. "However, I take it that intrinsic artistic merit is not important in this particular case."

"Not a bit," said Wimsey. He seemed to have suddenly grown more cheerful. "I'm frightfully obliged to you both. Come and have a drink. Several drinks. I rather want to celebrate."

"What?" said Waters, his face going very red and suddenly white again.

"Why?" said Graham. "Do you mean to say you've got your man? Is it one of us?"

"Yes," said Wimsey. "I mean, I think I've got the man. I ought to have known long ago. In fact, I never was in very much doubt. But now I know for certain."

CHAPTER XXIII

GOWAN'S STORY

"A CALL FOR YOU FROM LONDON, SIR," SAID THE CONSTABLE.

"Is that Inspector Macpherson of Kirk-kud-brite?" demanded London in ladylike tones.

"Ay," said Inspector Macpherson.

"*One* moment, please."

A pause. Then, "You're through," and an official voice:

"Is that Kirkcudbright Police Station? Is that Inspector Macpherson speaking? This is Scotland Yard. *One* moment, please."

A shorter pause. Then:

"Is that Inspector Macpherson? Oh, good morning, Inspector. This is Parker—Chief Inspector Parker of Scotland Yard. How are you?"

"Fine, thank you, sir. An' hoo's yersel'?"

"Blooming, thanks. Well, Inspector, we've found your man for you. He's come across with quite an entertaining story, but it's not quite the story you want. It's certainly important. Will you come and have a look at him or shall we send him up to you, or shall we just send the story and keep an eye on him?"

"Well, what does he say?"

"He admits meeting Campbell on the road that night and fighting with him, but he says he didn't kill him."

"That's only tae be expectit. What does he say he did wi' him?"

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A long chuckle rippled over the four hundred miles of wire.

"He says he didn't do anything with him. He says you've got it all wrong. He says *he* was the dead body in the car."

"What!"

"He says he was the body—Gowan was."

"Och, tae hell wi' 't!" exclaimed the Inspector, oblivious of etiquette. Parker chuckled again.

"He says Campbell knocked him out and left him there."

"Does he so, sir? Weel, I'm thinkin' it'll be best I should come an' see him. Can ye keep him till I come?"

"We'll do our best. You don't want him charged?"

"No, we'd better no charge him. The Chief Constable has thocht o' a new theory a'tegither. I'll be takin' the next train."

"Good. I don't think he'll object to waiting for you. As far as I can make out, there's only one thing he's really scared of, and that's being sent back to Kirkcudbright. Right; we'll expect you. How's Lord Peter Wimsey?"

"Och, he's jist awfu' busy wi' yin thing an' anither. He's a bright lad, yon."

"You can trust his judgment, though," said Parker

"I ken that fine, sir. Will I bring him with me?"

"We're always glad to see him," said Parker. "He's a little ray of sunshine about the old place. Invite him by all means. I think he would like to see Gowan."

.

But Lord Peter Wimsey refused the invitation.

"I'd adore to come," he said, "but I feel it would be mere self-indulgence. I fancy I know what story he's going to tell." He grinned. "I shall be missing something. But I can really be more useful—if I'm useful at all, that is—this end. Give

old Parker my love, will you, and tell him I've solved the problem."

"Ye've solved the problem?"

"Yes. The mystery is a mystery no longer."

"Wull ye no tell me what ye've made o't?"

"Not yet. I haven't proved anything. I'm only sure in my own mind."

"An' Gowan?"

"Oh, don't neglect Gowan. He's vitally important. And remember to take that spanner with you."

"Is't Gowan's spanner to your way of thinkin'?"

"It is."

"An' them marks on the corpse?"

"Oh, yes, that's all right. You can take it those marks come from the spanner."

"Gowan says ——" began the Inspector.

Wimsey looked at his watch.

"Away with you and catch your train," he said, cheerfully. "There's a surprise waiting for you at the end of the journey."

.

When Inspector Macpherson was shown into Parker's room, there was a dejected-looking man seated on a chair in the corner. Parker, after greeting the Inspector warmly, turned to this person and said:

"Now, Mr. Gowan, you know Inspector Macpherson, of course. He's very anxious to hear your story from yourself."

The man raised a face like the face of a sulky rabbit, and Inspector Macpherson, wheeling suddenly round upon him, fell back with a startled snort.

"Him? Yon's no the man."

"Isn't he?" said Parker. "He says he is, anyhow."

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"It's no Gowan," said Macpherson, "nor anything like him. I never saw yon ferrety-faced fellow in my life."

This was more than the gentleman in question could put up with.

"Don't be a fool, Macpherson," he said.

At the sound of his voice, the Inspector appeared to suffer a severe internal upheaval. The man got up and came forward into the light. Macpherson gazed in speechless bewilderment at the cropped black hair, the strong nose, the dark eyes, which gazed with an expression of blank astonishment from beneath a forehead denuded of eyebrows, the small, pinched mouth, with the upper teeth protruding over the lower lip, and the weak little chin which ran helplessly away to a long neck with a prominent Adam's-apple. The whole appearance of the apparition was not improved by a ten days' growth of black beard, which imparted a suggestion of seediness and neglect.

"It's Gowan's voice, right eneugh," admitted the Inspector.

"I think," said Parker, smothering his amusement, "that you find the removal of the beard and moustache a little misleading. Put on your hat, Mr. Gowan, and wrap your scarf about your chin. Then, perhaps ——"

The Inspector gazed with a kind of horror, as this metamorphosis was accomplished.

"Ay," he said, "ay, ye're right, sir, an' I'm wrang. But losh!—I beg your pardon, sir, but I couldna ha' believed ——"

He stared hard, and walked slowly round the captive as if still unable to credit his own eyes.

"If you've quite finished making an ass of yourself, Macpherson," said Mr. Gowan, coldly, "I'll tell you my story and get away. I've other things to do than fool around in police-stations."

"That's as may be," said the Inspector. He would not have spoken in that tone to the great Mr. Gowan of Kirkcudbright, but for this unkempt stranger he felt no sort of respect. "Ye have given us an awfu' deal o' trouble, Mr. Gowan, an' them servants o' yours will find theirsels afore the Fiscal for obstructin' the pollis in the pairformance o' their duty. Noo I'm here tae tak' yer statement, and it is ma duty tae warn ye ——"

Gowan waved an angry hand, and Parker said:

"He has been already cautioned, Inspector."

"Verra gude," said Macpherson, who by now had regained his native self-confidence. "Noo, Mr. Gowan, wull ye please tell me when an' where ye last saw Mr. Campbell that's deid, an' for why ye fled fra' Scotland in disguise?"

"I don't in the least mind telling you," said Gowan, impatiently, "except that I don't suppose you'll be able to hold your tongue about it. I'd been fishing up on the Fleet ——"

"A moment, Mr. Gowan. Ye wull be speakin' o' the events of the Monday, I'm thinkin'."

"Of course. I'd been fishing up on the Fleet, and I was driving back from Gatehouse to Kirkcudbright at about a quarter to ten when I nearly ran into that damned fool Campbell at the S-bend just beyond the junction of the Kirkcudbright road with the main road from Castle-Douglas to Gatehouse. I don't know what the man thought he was doing, but he had got his car stuck right across the road. Fortunately it wasn't at the most dangerous bit of the bend, or there would probably have been a most unholy smash. It was on the second half, where the curve is less abrupt. There's a stone wall one side and a sunk wall the other."

Inspector Macpherson nodded.

"I told him to get out of the way and he refused. He was undoubtedly drunk and in a very nasty mood. I'm sorry, I

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know he's dead, but it doesn't alter the fact that he always was one of Nature's prize swine, and that night he was at his very worst. He got out of his car and came up to me, saying that he was just about ready for a row, and if I wanted one I could have one. He jumped on my running-board and used the foulest language. I don't know now what it was all about. I had done nothing to provoke him, except to tell him to take his cursed car out of the way."

Gowan hesitated for a moment.

"I want you to understand," he went on, "that the man was drunk, dangerous and—as I thought at the moment—half off his rocker. He was a great, broad-shouldered, hefty devil, and I was jammed up behind the steering-column. I had a heavy King Dick spanner beside me in the pocket of the car and I grabbed hold of it—purely in self-defence. In fact, I only meant to threaten him with it."

"Is this the spanner?" interjected Macpherson, producing the instrument from his coat pocket.

"Very likely," said Gowan. "I don't profess to know one spanner from another as a shepherd knows his sheep, but it was a similar spanner at any rate. Where did you find that?"

"Go on with your statement, please, Mr. Gowan."

"You're very cautious. Campbell had got the door of the car open, and I wasn't going to sit there to be hammered into a jelly without defending myself. I pushed out from behind the wheel into the passenger's seat and stood up, with the spanner in my hand. He aimed a blow at me and I landed him one with the spanner. It caught him on the cheek-bone, but not very heavily, because he dodged it. I should think it must have marked him, though," added the speaker, with appreciation.

"It did that," said Macpherson, dourly.

"I can't pretend to be sorry to hear it. I jumped out at him, and he got me by the legs and we both rolled out into the road together. I hit out with the spanner for all I was worth, but he was about three times as strong as I was. He got his hands round my throat as we struggled, and I thought he was going to choke me. I couldn't shout and my only hope was that someone would come along. But by a damned bit of luck the road was absolutely deserted. He let go my throat just in time not to strangle me altogether and sat on my chest. I tried to get another one in with the spanner, but he snatched it out of my hand and threw it away. I was horribly impeded all this time by having my driving-gloves on."

"Ah!" said the Inspector.

"Ah, what?"

"That explains a lot, doesn't it?" said Parker.

"I don't follow you."

"Never mind, Mr. Gowan. Carry on."

"Well, after that——"

Gowan seemed now to have got to the most distasteful part of his story.

"I was in a pretty bad way by this time," he said, apologetically, "half-choked, you know. And whenever I tried to struggle, he lammed me in the face. Well, he—he got out a pair of nail-scissors—and he was calling me the most filthy names all this time—he got out his scissors——"

A twinkle—unsuppressible—gleamed in the Inspector's eye.

"I think we can guess at what happened then, Mr. Gowan," said he. "Forbye we found a nice wee hantle of black beard by the road-side."

"The damned brute!" said Gowan. "He didn't stop at the beard. He took off hair, eyebrows—everything. As a

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matter of fact, I didn't know that till later. His final blow knocked me out."

He felt his jaw-bone tenderly.

"When I came to," he went on, "I found myself in my own car in a sort of grass lane. I couldn't think where I was at first, but after a bit I made out that he'd run the car up a sort of cart-way just off the road. There's an iron gate that you go through. I daresay you know the place."

"Ay."

"Well—I was in a hell of a state. I felt frightfully ill. And besides—how on earth could I show myself in Kirkcudbright like that? I didn't know what to do, but I had to do something. I jammed my hat on, wound a scarf round the lower part of my face, and hared home like hell. It was lucky I didn't meet much on the road, because I was all to pieces—couldn't control the car. However, I got home—somewhere about a quarter past ten, I think.

"Alcock was a brick. Of course I had to tell him everything and he concocted all the plot. He got me up to bed without meeting his wife or the girl, and gave me first-aid for cuts and bruises and a hot bath, and then he suggested that I should pretend to have gone off to Carlisle. Our first idea was to say I was ill, but that would have meant visitors and fuss, and we should have had to have the doctor in, and square him. So that night we decided to pretend I'd gone to Carlisle by the 11.8 from Dumfries. Of course, we never supposed there'd be any inquiry, and we didn't think it worth while to send the car out specially. My housekeeper was roped into the conspiracy, but we thought it better not to trust the girl. She would be certain to talk. It was her night out, as it happened, so she wouldn't need to know when I came in, or anything, and the only person who'd know anything would be Campbell. He might talk, of course, but we

had to risk that, and, after all, when he came to his senses, he might realise that he'd be letting himself in for a charge of assault if he wasn't careful. Anyway, anything was better than going about in Kirkcudbright and being commiserated."

Gowan wriggled on his chair.

"Quite so, quite so," said Parker, soothingly. He passed the back of his thumb carelessly down his own profile as he spoke. It was irregular, but the chin was reassuringly prominent. He was clean-shaven and could, he felt, stand it reasonably well.

"Next day," said Gowan, "we heard the news about Campbell's death. Naturally, we never thought but that it was an accident, but we did realise that it was just possible somebody might want to ask me whether I'd seen him the evening before. It was then that Alcock had his bright idea. Hammond had actually been over to Dumfries the evening before at about 8.45 to do an errand, and Alcock suggested that he should tell everybody that I'd taken the 8.45 to Carlisle. Hammond was quite game to back up the story, and as people would have seen the car go, it all looked quite plausible. Of course there was the chance that I'd been seen driving home later than that, but we thought we could bluff that out as mistaken identity. Apparently the question didn't crop up?"

"Oddly eneugh," said Macpherson, "it didna. At least, not while a gude bit later."

"No. Well, Alcock was marvellous. He suggested that I should send a letter off by Tuesday afternoon's post, addressed to a friend in London—you know, Chief Inspector, Major Aylwin, through whom you got on my track—enclosing a letter from me to Alcock with directions that it was to be posted immediately. The letter was written as from

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my club, telling Alcock that he and Hammond could take the saloon and go for a holiday, as I should be detained for some time in Town. The idea was that they should smuggle me away with them in the car and drop me just outside Castle-Douglas, in time to catch the train to Town. I knew that I should never be recognised there without my beard, though, of course, Hammond or the car might have been identified. The letter duly came back to Alcock by the second post on Thursday, and we carried out the rest of the plan that night. Did it work?"

"Not altogether," said Macpherson, drily. "We made oot that part o't pretty weel."

"Of course, all this time I hadn't the faintest idea that Campbell had been murdered. Alcock must have known, I suppose, and it would really have been better if he'd told me. But he knew, too, of course, that I couldn't have had anything to do with it, and I shouldn't think it ever occurred to him that I could be suspected. I had so obviously left Campbell in the rudest of health and spirits."

He made a wry face.

"There's not much else to say. I felt horribly groggy all Tuesday and Wednesday, and I had gravel-rash all over my face. The brute had rolled me on the rough ground, blast him! Alcock was a splendid nurse. He got the wounds clean and put healing stuff on them. Regular professional touch he had at it, the old scout. Wouldn't touch me without washing himself elaborately in Lysol—took my temperature three times a day and all that. I believe he rather enjoyed it. On Thursday night I'd practically healed up, and was perfectly fit to travel. I got to Town without any trouble, and have been living all this time with Major Aylwin, who has been extremely decent to me. I only hope I shan't be wanted in Kirkcudbright just at present. When Mr. Parker

turned up this morning—by the way, Mr. Parker, how did you spot me? ”

“ Pretty easily,” said Parker, “ when we’d written to your old school and got a photograph of you without your beard. We found the porter who had taken your luggage at Euston, the taxi-driver who had taken you to Major Aylwin’s flat and the porter of the flats, who all recognised you. After that, you know, we had only to ring the bell and walk in.”

“ Good God! ” said Gowan. “ I never thought about those old photographs.”

“ The men hesitated a bit at first,” said Parker, “ till we had the bright notion of painting out the eyebrows as well. That made the appearance so—pardon me—peculiar, that they identified you with little cries of satisfaction.”

Gowan flushed.

“ Well,” he said, “ that’s my statement. Can I go home now? ”

Parker consulted Macpherson by a look.

“ We’ll have the statement put in writing,” he said, “ and perhaps then you will sign it. After that, I see no reason why you shouldn’t go back to Major Aylwin’s, but we shall ask you to keep in touch with us and not to change your address without letting us know.”

Gowan nodded, and later, when the statement had been typed out and signed, took his departure, still with the same startled look upon his eyebrowless face.

CHAPTER XXIV

FARREN : FERGUSON : STRACHAN

THE PROCURATOR-FISCAL HAD CALLED A COUNCIL OF WAR. Sir Maxwell Jamieson had brought Lord Peter with him. Inspector Macpherson was there by right of office and so was Sergeant Dalziel. Dr. Cameron was there, to see that nothing was suggested which would conflict with the medical evidence. In addition, Constable Ross and Constable Duncan were present by invitation. This was magnanimous on the part of their superiors, to whom Duncan had contrived to give a good deal of trouble, but there was a feeling that, in this confused and disconcerting case, even the opinion of a subordinate might be worth hearing.

The Fiscal opened the discussion by requesting the Chief Constable to state his views, but the latter demurred. He suggested that the police might, perhaps, put forward their theories with greater freedom if they were not previously biased by hearing his opinion. The result of this was a polite contest for second place between Macpherson and Dalziel, which was eventually won by Macpherson, on the ground that, as the body had actually been discovered in the Newton-Stewart district, Dalziel had, so to speak, the premier claim upon it.

Dalziel rather nervously cleared his throat.

"Weel noo, my lord, Mr. Fiscal, Sir Maxwell and gentlemen," he began, somewhat influenced in his opening by the recollection of the procedure at Football Club dinners, "it wad appear tae be uncontrovairtible that this puir gentle-

man met his death some time Monday night by the use of a blunt instrument, an' that his boady was conveyed tae the place whaur it was found. Forbye I'm thinkin' we're a' agreed that the pairson as kill't him wull ha' been an airtist, Lord Peter Wimsey havin' pointed oot that the verra handsome piece o' pentin' foond at the locus o' the crime must ha' been projouiced by the murderer himself. Owin' tae the careful inquiries o' Inspector Macpherson, we are able tae state that a' the airtists in this district can be accountit for durin' the period covered by the crime, forbye five, or maybe six, which is Mr. Farren, Mr. Gowan, Mr. Waters in Kirkcudbright, an' Mr. Strachan, Mr. Graham an' possibly Mr. Ferguson in Gatehouse. A' these six airtists had a motive for killin' the deceased, in so far as they had bin kent tae utter threats against him, and moreover, by a remairkable coincidence, no yin o' them possesses a satisfactory alibi for the haill period under consideration.

"A' six o' them hae made statements claimin' tae exonerate themsel's, an' if we agree that the guilt lies betune the six o' them, yin or mair o' them must be tellin' lees.

"Noo, takin' everything intae consideration, I am of the opeenion that oor inquiries should be directit tae the movements o' Mr. Farren, and for why? Because he had a much bigger motive for murder than the lave o' them. He seems tae ha' considered that the deceased was payin' too much attention tae Mistress Farren. I'm sayin' nae word against the leddy, but that was the idea this Farren had got intae his heid. I canna credit that ony gentleman wad murder anither for twa-three words about a bit picture, or for a wee difference of opeenion consairnin' a game o' gowf, or a couple troot or a quarrel aboot nationalities. But when it's a maitter o' a man's domestic happiness, there, tae my thinkin', ye have a gude cause for murder.

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"We ken weel that Farren set oot fra' Kirkcudbright that night wi' the fixed intention o' findin' Campbell an' doin' him some damage. He gaed doon tae the cottage, where he was seen by Mr. Ferguson, an' he gaed up to Mr. Strachan's hoose, an' by his ain confession he left a letter tae say as he was away tae find Campbell an' hae't oot wi' him. After this, he disappears till we find him at 3 o'clock on the Tuesday afternoon on the New Galloway road.

"Noo, the Inspector and me thocht first of a' that Farren had murdered Campbell on the road betune Gatehoose and Kirkcudbright, an' we were puzzled how he cam' there and why he should ha' carried on that queer way wi' Campbell's car. We were obleeged tae bring Mr. Strachan intil't. But noo we see as there was no necessity far a' they whig-maleeries. We ken noo that 'twas Mr. Gowan as met Campbell on the road an' was assaulted by him, an' that Campbell gaed away hame in his ain car as was likely eneugh. We ken likewise, fra' Mr. Ferguson's and Mr. Strachan's evidence, that either Campbell was alive after midnight or that some ither pairson entered the cottage. It is my belief that yon ither pairson was Farren, as had been lyin' in wait for Campbell in the vicinity o' the cottage."

"Just a minute," put in Sir Maxwell. "I take it you accept Strachan's statement as far as the note and his subsequent visit to the cottage are concerned."

"Ay, sir, I do that. Bein' friendly wi' Mr. Farren, he wadna hae inventit sic a tale, an' it agrees fine wi' Farren's ain statement. I'll tell ye what I think wull ha' been the way o't. I've got it a' writ doon here on a bit paper."

The Sergeant wrestled with the pocket of his tunic and produced a fat notebook, from which he extracted a rather grubby sheet of paper, folded extremely small. He spread this out on the table, flattening it with the palm of a broad

hand, and, having thus reduced it to order, passed it to the Fiscal, who, settling his glasses more firmly on his nose, read aloud as follows:—

Case against Farren

Monday.

- 6 p. m. Farren at Kirkcudbright. Finds Campbell in the house. Quarrel with Mrs. Farren.
- 7 p. m. Farren proceeds by bicycle to Gatehouse.
- 8 p. m. Farren arrives at Standing Stone cottage asking for Campbell, and is seen by Ferguson.
- 8-9.15 p. m. Farren in various public-houses, using threats against Campbell.
- 9.15 p. m. Farren goes to Strachan's house and leaves note (on bicycle).
- 9.25 till after dark. Farren in hiding, probably somewhere on the Lauriston or Castramont Road.
- 9.45 p. m. Campbell meets Gowan when returning from Kirkcudbright.
- 10.20 p. m. Campbell returns to Standing Stone cottage with car. Heard by Ferguson.
- 10.20 p. m.-12 midnight. Some time during this period Farren proceeds to Campbell's cottage on bicycle. Lets himself in and kills Campbell. Hides body. (Note: Ferguson presumably asleep.) Farren goes out, locking door. Remains in hiding, perhaps in garage.
- 12 midnight. Strachan arrives in car (heard by Ferguson). Enters by means of key. Leaves note and departs.

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- Monday 12 midnight-Tuesday 7:30 a. m. Farren re-enters cottage, destroys Strachan's note, puts body in car, matures plan of escape, puts bicycle and painting materials in car, prepares and eats Campbell's breakfast.
- 7.30 a. m. Farren, disguised as Campbell, starts out from Gatehouse in Campbell's car. Seen by Ferguson.
- 9.35 a. m. Farren in Campbell's car seen by workman passing turning to New Galloway road between Creetown and Newton-Stewart.
- 10 a. m. Farren arrives at Minnoch with body.
- 10-11.30 a. m. Farren paints picture.
- 11.30 a. m. Farren throws body into Minnoch and departs on bicycle, using the side road from Bargrennan to Minnigaff. (Note: conjectural; no witness as yet produced.) Eight or nine miles.
- 12.30 p. m. Farren arrives at Falbae. Leaves bicycle in vicinity of disused mine.
- 12.30-3 p. m. Farren walks by New Galloway road to Brig o' Dee; eleven miles; but he may easily have taken a lift from a passing motorist.
The rest of Farren's movements as per his statement.

"That," said the Fiscal, looking round over the tops of his glasses, "appears to me a very plausible and workman-like conjecture."

"It's damned good," said Wimsey.

"Really," said Sir Maxwell, "it seems to cover almost everything, and almost shakes me in my own convictions. It is so beautifully simple."

"Is it no," said Macpherson, "a wee thing too simple?"

It disna tak' intae account the remairkable episode o' the bicycle that was sent fra' Ayr tae Euston."

Sergeant Dalziel, modestly elated by the applause of the three most distinguished persons in the company, was encouraged to dissent from his superior's view.

"I dinna see," said he, "why yon bicycle should be took intae account at a'. I see no necessity tae connect it wi' the maitter o' Campbell. If onybody was tae steal a bicycle fra' the Anwoth, and if, some gate, it was sent tae Lunnon by a mistake, that's yin thing, but what for should we suppose the murderer wad gae oot o' his way tae indulge in such antics, when there's anither explanation that's plain an' simple?"

"Yes," said the Fiscal, "but why should a man take the trouble to steal a bicycle from Gatehouse to go to Ayr, when he could easily have gone the whole way by train? I'll not deny there's something very mysterious about the story of the bicycle."

"Ay," said Macpherson, "an' how do ye account for the surprisin' length o' time ta'en to get fra' Gatehouse tae the New Galloway road? It's only seventeen mile by the high road when a's said an' dune."

Dalziel looked a little dashed at this, but Wimsey came to his assistance.

"Farren told me," he said, "that he had only driven a car two or three times in his life. He may have got into some difficulty or other. Suppose he ran out of petrol, or got a blocked feed or something. He would probably first of all have a shot at doing something himself—sit about pressing the self-starter or peering hopefully under the bonnet—before he could prevail on himself to ask anybody for help. Possibly he merely ran out of petrol, and had to shove the car down a side-road somewhere and walk to the nearest garage. Or suppose he went by the old road past Gatehouse

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Station and got into difficulties up there. An inexperienced driver might waste a lot of time."

"It's possible," said Macpherson, with a dissatisfied air. "It's possible. I wadna go farther than that."

"By the way," said the Chief Constable, "on your theory, Dalziel, how do you account for Strachan's hat and the tale he told about meeting Farren up at Falbae? Because, if your version is correct, that must have been pure invention."

"I account for't this way," said Dalziel. "I think it's a fact that Mr. Strachan searched for Farren at Falbae as he said, an' didna find hide nor hair on him. An' it may verra weel be that he tummel't intae the mine as he says he did. But I think that, no findin' him, he was feart Farren had been up tae mischief, an' when he heard o' the findin' o' Campbell's boady, he juist added a wee word or twa tae his story, tae gie Farren some kind of an alibi. 'Deed an' I'm thinkin' 'tis gude proof o' my theory that Strachan still evidently suspects Farren. Ye ken fine yersel', Sir Maxwell, that he was awfu' saircumspect in tellin' ye his tale and wadna ha' tell't ye a single word o' Farren's note if ye hadna persuadit him ye kened the truth a'ready."

"Ay," said the Chief Constable, "but I had my own notion about that."

"Well, let's hear your notion, Sir Maxwell," said the Fiscal.

"I was wishful," said Sir Maxwell, "to let the police have their say first, but perhaps my idea does come in better at this point. Of course, the very first thing that struck me wa's the obvious collusion between Farren and Strachan to conceal something, but I looked at it in rather a different way. In my opinion, it was Strachan that had the guilty knowledge, and his difficulty was to protect himself without implicating Farren too much. Farren, by his behaviour and his

threats and his disappearance, provided an almost perfect screen for Strachan, and it is, I think, very much to Strachan's credit that he was so unwilling to make use of it.

"Now, the weak point of your story, Dalziel, if I may say so, seems to me to occur at the moment of the murder itself. I simply cannot believe that, if it took place as you say at the cottage, between midnight and morning, it could have done so without disturbing Ferguson. Campbell was a powerful man, and, unless he was battered to death in his sleep, there would have been a noise and a struggle. Given the characters of all the people concerned, I cannot bring myself to believe that this was a case of a midnight assassin, creeping stealthily up to Campbell's bedroom and felling him with one blow, before he had time to cry out. It is, in particular, exceedingly unlike what one might expect from Farren. On the other hand, if there was a noisy fight, I cannot understand why Ferguson heard nothing of it. It was August, the windows would be wide open, and, in any case, besides the actual noise of the quarrel, there would be a great deal of going to and fro in the night, taking the corpse out to the car and so on, that Ferguson could scarcely have failed to hear.

"My theory is this. I think Farren's story is true. It is too absurd and whimsical a story not to be true, and all Farren's alleged actions are exactly the sort of daft thing Farren would do. I feel sure that Farren isn't the man to plan out an elaborate fake like the planting of the body and the painting of the picture. The man who did that was perfectly cool and unemotional, and he would have known a great deal better than to go and lose himself in that suspicious way immediately afterwards. No. Depend upon it, the man who committed the crime would take the very first opportunity of reappearing in his usual haunts.

"The way I see it is this. Strachan got that note from

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Farren and went down to the cottage as he said. When he got there, one of two things happened, and I am not perfectly sure which. I *think* Campbell opened the door to him and I think that he went in and had an interview with Campbell which ended in a violent quarrel and struggle. I think Ferguson was awakened by the noise, and came down just at the moment when Strachan had knocked Campbell down and killed him. Or possibly he arrived to find Strachan and Campbell fighting together, and then himself struck the blow which finished Campbell. There is the third possibility that the situation was reversed, and that Strachan came in to find Campbell already dead and Ferguson standing over him red-handed. I think that is rather less likely, for a reason I'll explain later.

"In any case, I'm sure we have this situation—the two men at the cottage with Campbell's dead body and one at least of them guilty of killing him. Now, what would they do next? It is quite conceivable that, if only one of them had a hand in it, the other should at first threaten to inform the police, but there might be difficulties about that. Both men were well known to have quarrelled previously with Campbell, and the accused man might very well threaten to bring a counter-accusation. In any case, I fancy they realised that they were both of them in an exceedingly awkward position, and decided to help each other out if possible.

"Which of the two had the idea of faking the accident I don't know, of course, but I should imagine it would be Strachan. He is a man of particularly quick and keen intellect—just the sort that can think well ahead and foresee the consequences of his actions. The first bold outline of the idea would probably be his, but Ferguson no doubt helped, with his remarkable memory for details.

"They would hope, naturally, that the whole thing would

be accepted as pure accident, but they would remember that, if once a murder was suspected, they would need alibis to cover the whole period from midnight to the following mid-day. Obviously, they couldn't both have alibis for the whole period, but they might do equally well by dividing the time. Eventually they decided that Strachan was to establish the alibi for the night hours, while Ferguson did everything necessary in connection with the body, and that Ferguson would then establish his alibi for the next morning, while Strachan painted the picture."

The Chief Constable paused and looked round to see how his audience were taking this. Encouraged by a little hum of appreciative surprise, he took up his tale again.

"The reason why they worked it that way is, I think, that Ferguson had already announced his intention of going to Glasgow in the morning, and that any sudden change of plan might appear odd. They now had to think of some alibi which Strachan could reasonably put forward at that hour of the night, and the best thing they could think of was that he should carry out his original intention of going after Farren."

"But," interposed the Fiscal, "was not that a very difficult and uncertain plan on which to rely? It was a hundred to one against his meeting Farren. Would it not have been simpler to knock up some person with a suitable story? He could, for instance, have communicated to somebody his fears about Farren, and even taken that person with him as a witness to his alibi."

"I don't think so," said Sir Maxwell. "That point occurred to me also, but when I came to think the matter over, I saw that Strachan's plan was about the best he could have adopted in the circumstances. For one thing, I believe that it would have been very awkward for him to present himself in public at that moment. I think that he had already received that

blow in the eye which he afterwards accounted for in another manner. That is why I said I felt pretty sure that Strachan took part in the struggle with Campbell, even though he may not have struck the fatal blow himself. Moreover, suppose he did knock somebody up to inquire about Farren, and suppose that somebody kindly offered to accompany him in his search? He would then, as the Fiscal truly says, have an unimpeachable witness to his alibi—certainly he would. But what if he could not get rid of the witness in time to do the very important job he had to do the next morning? What reason could he possibly give for abandoning his search for Farren and rushing away to Newton-Stewart? And how could he prevent people from knowing where he was going, if once he got a hue-and-cry started? Whatever happened, he had to get up to the Minnoch early the next morning, and he had to do it in secret.

"As a matter of fact, I don't think his plan turned out as he intended. Indeed, it went very near to miscarrying altogether. I feel sure his original intention was to find Farren and bring him home—either to Kirkcudbright or to his own house at Gatehouse. He could then have explained his black eye as being due to a fall sustained in his search at Falbae."

"But," objected Wimsey, who had been following all this argument with a keenness which his half-drooped eyelids scarcely veiled, "he'd still have to trundle off to the Minnoch next morning, wouldn't he, old thing?"

"Yes," said Sir Maxwell, "so he would. But if he had dropped Farren at Kirkcudbright, he could easily have driven straight away again from there. He would hardly be expected to stay and make a third in the conjugal reunion. Then he could have gone off where he liked—perhaps leaving some sort of reassuring message for Mrs. Strachan. Or similarly, if he had taken Farren to Gatehouse, he could

then have gone off for the ostensible purpose of reassuring Mrs. Farren about her husband. When he was once away, he could always be detained somewhere, by engine-trouble or what not. I see no great difficulty about that."

"All right," said Wimsey. "I pass that. Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll."

"Well then, Strachan drove off in search of Farren, leaving Ferguson to pack the body up and do all the necessary things about the house. And by the way, I may as well say at this point that I don't think any of you have paid sufficient attention to these things that were done about the house. The man who did them must have known a great deal about Campbell's manner of living. He must have known exactly when to expect Mrs. Green, for example, and the way Campbell behaved when at home—whether he was tidy or untidy, for instance, and what sort of breakfast he usually had, and all that kind of thing. Otherwise, Mrs. Green would have noticed that something out of the ordinary had happened. Now, how could Farren or Waters or Gowan or Graham be aware of all these domestic details? The man who would know them was Ferguson, who was his next-door neighbour and employed the same daily woman. He would be the one person who might habitually see Campbell having breakfast and puttering about the house; and what he didn't know from his own observation he'd be sure to get from Mrs. Green in the course of her daily gossip."

"That's a damned good point, Chief," said Wimsey, with the detached air of an Eton boy applauding a good stroke by a Harrow captain. "Damned good. Of course, Mrs. Green would be full of information. 'Och, Mr. Campbell's an awfu' mon wi' his pyjammers. Yesterday he was leavin' them in the coal-hole an' them only jist back fra' the laundry. An' to-day I'm findin' them in the stoojo an' him usin' them for

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a pentin'-rag.' One learns a lot about one's neighbours by listening to what is called kitchen-talk."

"Ay, that's so," said Macpherson, a little doubtfully.

Sir Maxwell smiled. "Yes," he said, "when I came to think the matter over, that struck me very forcibly. But to go on with Strachan. There's no doubt he did find Farren, and there, I admit, he was rather lucky, though perhaps the chances against his doing so were not quite a hundred to one. After all, he had an extremely good idea where Farren was likely to be found, and he knew the ground about Falbae pretty well."

"Ay, that's so," said Dalziel, "but whit wad he ha' done, sir, if Farren really had throwed himsel' doon the mine?"

"That would have been rather unfortunate for him, I admit," said the Chief Constable. "In that case, he would have had to forgo his alibi for the early morning. All he could have done would be to leave some object or objects at Falbae to show that he had been there—his hat, for example, or his overcoat—and carry out his painting job at the Minnoch as early as possible, returning later to give the alarm and start the search for Farren. He could explain that he had been searching in some other place in the interim. It wouldn't have been so good, but it would have been fairly good, especially as the subsequent discovery of Farren's body would have been a very good witness to the truth of his story. However, he did find Farren, so we need not bother about that.

"Unhappily, however, the plan came rather unstuck at this point. Farren, instead of coming quietly, escaped, and Strachan tumbled into a mine. This very nearly prevented Strachan from carrying out his part of the plot at all. He did fall down, he did have a job to extricate himself—though it didn't take him quite as long as he said it did—and that

was why he was so late in getting up to the Minnoch. If his plan had worked out properly, he no doubt hoped to be back with Farren at, say, 3 o'clock in the morning, and then go straight on to pick up the car and the body where Ferguson had left them ready for him."

"And where would that be?" asked the Fiscal.

"I can't say exactly, but the idea would be for Ferguson to drive Campbell's car up to some suitable spot—say by the old road through Gatehouse Station to Creetown—and leave it there to be picked up and taken on by Strachan. Ferguson would then return on a bicycle ——"

"What bicycle?" said Wimsey.

"Any bicycle," retorted the Chief Constable, "except, of course, the Anwoth Hotel bicycle that we've heard so much about. It's not difficult to borrow bicycles in these parts, and he would have had plenty of time to bring it back and leave it where he found it. Ferguson would be back, say, at 7 o'clock, in good time to eat his own breakfast and catch the omnibus for Gatehouse Station."

"He must have been full of breakfast by that time," observed the Fiscal, "having already eaten Campbell's."

"My dear man," said the Chief Constable, rather irritably, "if you had committed a murder and were trying to get away with it, you wouldn't let a trifle like a second breakfast stand in your way."

"If I had committed a murder," replied the Fiscal, "I would feel no appetite even for one breakfast."

The Chief Constable restrained any expression of feeling at this frivolous comment. Macpherson, who had been jotting words and figures in his notebook, struck in at this point.

"Then I take it, sir, this'll be your time-table for the crime."

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Case against Ferguson and Strachan

Monday.

- 9.15 p. m. Farren leaves note at Strachan's house.
- 10.20 p. m. Campbell returns home after encounter with Gowan.
- 12 midnight or thereabouts. Strachan returns home and finds note.

Tuesday.

- 12.10 a. m. (say). Strachan goes to Campbell's cottage; is joined by Ferguson. Murder is committed.
- 12.10-12.45 (say). Plan of fake accident evolved. Strachan starts for Falbae, taking Campbell's hat and cloak, painting materials, etc., in car.
- 2-3 a. m. During this period Strachan and Farren meet and Farren escapes.
- 3.30 a. m. (say). Strachan falls down mine.
- 4 a. m. (say). Ferguson arrives at some spot on old road from Gatehouse Station to Creetown, with Campbell's car containing body and bicycle. Leaves car hidden.
- 5-6 a. m. Ferguson returns on bicycle to Gatehouse by old road.
- 9 a. m. Strachan extricates himself from mine and finds his car.
- 9.8 a. m. Ferguson takes the train to Dumfries.
- 9.20 a. m. Strachan arrives at rendezvous, transfers himself to Campbell's car. Hides own car. Disguises himself.
- 9.35 a. m. Strachan disguised as Campbell seen by workman passing turning to New Galloway.
- 10 a. m. Strachan arrives at Minnoch. Plants body and paints picture.

11.15 a. m. Strachan finishes picture.

Here Macpherson paused.

"How will Strachan get back tae his car, sir? 'Tis fourteen mile gude. He culdna du't on his twa feet?"

"Farren's bicycle," replied the Chief Constable, promptly. "You should have made him pick that up at Falbae. Of course, if his original plan hadn't gone wrong, he would either have borrowed another bicycle or had time to go on foot, but under the circumstances, with Farren's machine lying ready to hand, he would take advantage of it."

"Ay, sir; but ye have an answer tae everything," Macpherson shook his head soberly and returned to his timetable.

12.45 p. m. Strachan returns on Farren's bicycle to Cree-town; abandons bicycle. Transfers to own car.

1.15 p. m. Strachan returns to Gatehouse by Skyre Burn road.

"That," said the Fiscal, who had been checking this timetable with the Chief Constable's report of his interview with Strachan, "agrees very well with Strachan's statement to you."

"It does," replied Sir Maxwell, "and, what is still more important, it agrees with the facts. We have found a man who distinctly remembers seeing Strachan passing along the Skyre Burn road between 1 o'clock and 1.20. Moreover, we have traced his telephone-call to the McClellan Arms, and it was put through at 1.18 precisely."

"You realise," said Wimsey, "that you've only allowed him an hour and a quarter for painting that picture. I had two of the slickest men in the district working on it, and the

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quicker painter of the two couldn't get the result under an hour and a half."

"That's true," said the Chief Constable, grimly, "but he wasn't painting for his life, you know."

"I wad like tae be sairtain o' that," said a voice. Everybody was surprised. P. C. Duncan had sat so silent that they had almost forgotten his existence.

"Is that so?" said the Chief Constable. "Well, Duncan, you're here to give us your opinion. Suppose we have it now."

The policeman shifted on his chair and glanced uneasily at Dalziel. He had an obscure idea that he was going to let himself in for a wiggling, but he stuck manfully to his guns, and opened fire with a flourish.

CHAPTER XXV

GRAHAM : GOWAN : WATERS

"THEM TWA THEORIES," SAID P. C. DUNCAN, "IS JIST fine, an' I'm no sayin' the contrair', but, mon! they're jist awfu' complicated. It mak's ma heid spin only tae think o' them. I wadna wish tae be puttin' masel' forrit, but I wad like fine tae know how Sir Maxwell Jamieson thinks that yon plan could ha' been a' talked oot in three-quarters o' an hour."

"Well," replied Sir Maxwell, "those times are very elastic. Provided we get Strachan up to Falbae before it's too light for tumbling into mines, I don't mind how late you make him start."

"But no matter for that," put in the Fiscal, seeing that Duncan looked a little discouraged. "If you have a better and simpler idea to offer, by all means put it forward."

"I was jist thinkin', then," said Duncan, "and beggin' your pardon, Dr. Cameron, whether it was not, after all, possible that the man was kill't the same day he was found. Ye'll no be offended, doctor?"

"Not at all," said Dr. Cameron, heartily. "Speak out your mind, man. This business of speaking to the precise time of death is not so easy as ye'd think by reading detective novels. In my experience, the older a medical man gets, the less willing he is to make *ex cathedra* pronouncements, and the more he learns that Nature has her own ways of confounding self-confident prophets."

"Ay," said Duncan, "I've jist been readin' a wee buik

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about the subject. It's a gran' buik, an' it was gied me by my feyther for my last birthday. My feyther was an awfu' weel-eddicated mon for his station in life, an' he wad always be tellin' me that studyin' was the road tae success."

He laid a large, square, brown-paper parcel on the table as he spoke, and slowly untied the stout string with which it was secured.

"This here," said he, as the last knot yielded and the paper was turned back to disclose the "wee buik"—a formidable volume nine inches long by six inches across and thick in proportion—"this here is ca'ed *Forensic Medicine and Toxicology* by Dixon Mann, an' there's gran' readin' in it for a man in oor profession. Noo, there's a passage here as I'd like tae get your opinion on, doctor. I've pit a wee bit paper tae mark the place. Ay, here 'tis, page thirty-seven. This is about the death-stiffenin'."

"*Rigor mortis*," said the doctor.

"Ay, that's what it is, only here it's ca'ed Cay-day-verric Rigeedity, but 'tis that same rigor he means. Yon's jist his difficult name for't. Noo, here's whit this man says, an' he'll be a great authority, for my puir feyther paid a terrible deal o' money for the buik. 'Under ordinary circumstances the'—och, dear!—the s-k-e-l-e-t-a-l, the skeeleetal muscles begin tae stiffen in fra' fower tae ten hours after death.' Fower tae ten hours. Noo, that'll gie us what ye might ca' a margin o' six hours' error in estimatin' the time o' death. Wull't no, doctor?"

"Other things being equal," said the doctor, "yes."

"Ay, an' here again: 'It is fully developed,' that is, the rigor, ye onnerstand, 'in fra' twa tae three hours.' That'll gie us anither hour's margin."

"Well, yes."

"Ay. 'This condition lasts for a period varyin' from a few

hours tae six or eight days.' There's a terrible big difference there, doctor!"

"So there is," said Dr. Cameron, smiling slightly, "but there are other things to be taken into consideration besides *rigor mortis*. You'll not be suggesting the body was six or eight days old?"

"Not at all, doctor. But it gaes on tae say, 'Twenty-four tae forty-eight hours may be regarded as the average duration of ca-da ——' that is, o' this rigor. Ye'll allow, maybe, that this great authority isna so varra preceese tae twa-three hours. Noo, then, doctor, when ye saw this corpse at 3 o'clock o' the afternoon, how stiff was he?"

"He was quite stiff," replied the doctor. "That is, to employ the stately language of your great authority, the cadaveric rigidity was fully established. This made it probable that the man had then been dead not less than six hours and probably—taking the appearance of the bruises, etc., into account—considerably longer. Taking Mr. Dixon Mann's pronouncement as the basis of a diagnosis, you will see that it would allow death to have taken place as much as thirteen hours earlier—ten hours to start the rigor and three to develop it fully. That is, the death might have taken place as late as 9 a. m. or as early as midnight, and the body would still have been stiff at 3 p. m., without its being necessary to presume anything abnormal in the onset or development of the rigor."

"Ay, but ——" began Macpherson, hastily.

"Ay, that's jist what I ——" began Duncan, at the same moment.

"One minute," said the doctor. "I know what ye're about to say, Inspector. I'm not fully allowing for the case that the rigor might have been completely established some time before I saw it. Supposing the rigor had come on slowly and

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had been fully developed, say, at 1 o'clock. That would make it possible that the death took place as early as 10 p. m. the day before. I told you before that that was not impossible."

Macpherson gave a satisfied grunt.

"Campbell was a man in vigorous health," went on the doctor, "and he died from a sudden blow. If you'll consult that authority of yours a bit farther on, Duncan, you'll see it says that, under those conditions, the onset of cadaveric rigidity is likely to be slow."

"Ay, doctor," persisted the policeman, "but ye'll see also that when the subject is exhausted an' depressed in his physical strength, the rigidity may come on verra quick. Noo, I was thinkin' that yon Campbell must ha' passed an awfu' exhaustin' nicht. He was fightin' wi' Mr. Waters at 9 o'clock or thereabouts, he was fightin' again wi' Mr. Gowan at 9.45, an' he had his inside fu' o' whuskey forbye, which is weel known tae be depressin' in its effects—that is," he added hastily, catching a slight grin on Wimsey's face, "after the high speerits o' the moment is wore off. Then he's away oot airly in the mornin' wi'oot his breakfast, as was established by examination o' his insides, an' he drives his car twenty-seven mile. Wad he no be sufficiently exhausted wi' a' that tae stiffen up quick when he was killed?"

"You seem to have thought this out, Duncan," said the doctor. "I see I shall have to be careful, or I shall be caught tripping. I will only say this. The average duration of *rigor mortis* is from twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Campbell's body was rigid when I saw it on Tuesday afternoon at 3 o'clock, and it was still rigid on Wednesday night when it was put into its coffin. On Thursday evening, when I examined it in the presence of a number of you gentlemen, the rigidity had entirely passed off. That gives a fairly average duration for the rigor. In general, a quick onset is followed

by a short duration, and a slow onset by a long duration. In this case, the duration appeared average to slow, and I conclude that the onset would also have been average to slow. That is why I finally gave it as my considered opinion that the most probable time of death was somewhere round about midnight, and this agreed with the general appearance of the body and the bruises."

"How about the contents of the stomach?" asked Sir Maxwell.

"The contents of the stomach was whiskey," said the doctor, drily, "but I'm not saying how late on Monday night the deceased would be drinking whiskey."

"But," said Duncan, "supposin' the murder didna take place till 9 o'clock or so on the Tuesday, that wad shorten the duration of the rigor."

"Well, of course," said the doctor. "If he didn't die till Tuesday morning, that might bring the duration of the rigor down to a little over thirty-six hours. I can only speak to the period between 3 p. m. on Tuesday and 7 p. m. on Wednesday, when I handed it over to the undertaker."

"Well, the point appears to be," said the Fiscal, "that, though the appearances suggest to you a death round about midnight, you may be in error to the extent of an hour or two either way."

"That is so."

"Could you be in error to the extent of eight or nine hours?"

"I would not like to think so," replied the doctor, cautiously, "but I would not say it was impossible. There's very few things impossible in Nature, and an error in diagnosis is not one of them."

"Weel," said Dalziel, eyeing his subordinate with some disfavour, "ye hear what the doctor says. He'll no say it is

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impossible, an' that's mair nor ye could ha' expectit, an' you tae be questionin' his great experience, with your *rigor mortis* an' your auld feyther, an' your wee buik an' a'. 'Tis tae be hoped ye can gie a gude reason for your presumption. Ye'll kindly excuse him, doctor. Duncan is a gude lad, but he's ower zealous."

Duncan, thus stimulated, began again, blushing hotly all over his face.

"Weel, sirs, the point I started from was this, that oot of a' six suspects there's not one that's been proved to ha' been nigh the place where the corpse was found, only Mr. Graham. But we've evidence that Graham was actually seen at Bargrennan the verra morning o' the murder. An', what's mair, he admits tae't himsel'."

"That's a fact," said the Fiscal. "You've got in here in your notes that this man Brown saw Graham walking along the banks of the Cree just below Bargrennan at half-past eleven on Tuesday morning. He says that Graham was going upstream, and that when he saw Brown approaching, he scrambled quickly down the bank as though to avoid observation. That certainly looks like a suspicious circumstance."

"Ay," said Duncan, excitedly. "An' when Graham is questioned, what does he say? First of a', he refuses tae state whaur he's been. An' that, mind you, before there's ony suspicion gi'en oot that Campbell's death was mair nor an accident. That's yin thing. Secondly, as sune as it's known through the papers that it may be a case o' murder, he comes forrit wi' a fause alibi for the Monday nicht only."

"Stop a moment, Duncan," said Sir Maxwell. "If, as you seem to suppose, Graham did not commit the murder till Tuesday morning, there would be no point in his bringing forward an alibi for Monday night. He'd know it would not cover him."

"Ay, that's so," said Duncan, screwing up his ingenuous face into an expression of the most concentrated cunning, "but it was the leddy brought forrit the alibi, an' why? Because it had been pit about—I'm no sayin' by whom—that the murder was maist probably committed o' the Monday nicht. Then the leddy—that kens fine Graham did the murder but isna sae weel informed as tae the time—fa's heid ower heels intae the trap. She says, 'He couldna ha' done't; he was wi' me.' Mr. Dalziel asks her sharp and sudden, 'How long was he wi' you?' She says, 'Till past 9 o'clock,' knowin' verra weel that if she was tae say till 12 o'clock or some such hour, the next question wad be, 'Did naebody see him leavin' the hoose?'—which, wi' a' the folks astir in the toon, is no verra probable. Verra gude. Then Graham hears on't an' says tae himsel', 'I maun du better than that. Likely enough I was recognised by that fellow up yonder. I'll say I was the haill of they twa nichts and days up at Bargrennan poachin' wi' Jimmy Fleeming an' Jimmy'll bear me oot.' An' that's when he comes in wi' his second alibi."

"Jimmy Fleming does bear him out, as far as I can see," observed the Fiscal, turning over his papers.

"Och, ay," said Duncan, "Jimmy Fleeming's the biggest leear in the Stewartry. Forbye, Graham is weel likit by that poachin' lot. There's no a man among them that wadna swear to a wee lie or so tae protect Graham."

"That's true enough," said Macpherson. "An' there's no need for them tae be tellin' sic a big lie, neither. They'd be up half the nicht wi' their poachin' an' sleepin' half the day. What's tae hinder Graham walking off an' committin' his murder—ay, an' pentin' his bit picture—wi'oot them knowin'? He wad say he's ta'en a wee walk, maybe. Or

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maybe they'd be sleepin' and never notice when he comed or gaed?"

"Your idea, Duncan, is that Campbell came up to the Minnoch—when, exactly?"

"That's clear enough," said Wimsey. "We've got to take Ferguson's times, because, on this assumption, there's no reason for doubting them. Starting at 7.30, and driving at an ordinary speed, he wouldn't be likely to do the twenty-seven miles in much under an hour. Say he arrives there at 8.30 and sits down and gets his painting things out. Graham, taking his morning walk, gets along there at, say, 8.45. They quarrel, and Campbell is knocked into the river and killed. At 9 o'clock, summer time, Graham might reasonably begin to do his painting. It takes him an hour and a half. We know that, because we've seen him do it—at least, I have. That brings us to half-past ten. But we know he was still there at five past eleven, so we'll have to give him till then. That's quite likely, because if, when I saw him, he was merely copying his own painting, he'd probably do it quicker than if it was his first effort. As soon as he's finished, and the road is free of inquisitive passers-by, he strolls back to his sleeping friends, who will subsequently be ready to swear that they never took their eyes off him the whole time. That's your theory, isn't it, Duncan?"

"Ay, that's it," said Duncan, gratified.

"It's not a bad one, either, as far as it goes," went on his lordship, with the air of a man sampling a glass of old port. "It has at least three snags, but I daresay they could be demolished with a little goodwill. First, the doctor has got to be all wrong in his calculations, but, as he doesn't seem to mind that, neither need we. Secondly, who ate Campbell's breakfast? Well, we can suppose that, having drunk rather deeply the night before, he nevertheless courageously cooked

his egg and rasher and, having cooked them, didn't like the look of them and shot them into the fire. Or we can suppose—though I should hate to do so—that Mrs. Green ate them herself and said she hadn't. Or we can suppose that Campbell ate them, was promptly sick, and filled up the void with whiskey. Any one of those suppositions would account for the conditions as found, eh, doctor?

"Then there are the marks of tar on Campbell's Morris, which we put down to bicycle-tyres, but they might quite well have been due to something else. I pointed them out in the first place, but I wouldn't be bigoted about them on that account. They're not significant enough to wreck a theory on.

"The big snag in Duncan's ingenious reconstruction is the man who saw the car pass the New Galloway turning at 9.45. I'm afraid Duncan hasn't accounted for him at all. Still, we can say he was mistaken. If a doctor can be mistaken, so can an honest workman. He didn't see the number of the car, so it may have been another Morris."

"But the piled-up stuff under the rug at the back," said the Chief Constable, "and the driver's conspicuous cloak. You can't get away from them."

"Can't I?" said Wimsey. "You don't know me. I could get away from a galloping fire-engine. You'd been advertising for a Morris car driven by a man in a loud cloak, with a pile of luggage behind, hadn't you? Well, you know what happens when you advertise for things. A man sees something that corresponds to part of the description and imagines the rest. Probably twenty Morris cars drove over the main road from Castle-Douglas to Stranraer that morning and probably half of those had luggage in them. Several of them may have been driven by gentlemen whose dress was more noisy than discriminating. Your man had no very particular reason to notice the car at the time, except that he

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shot out on it unexpectedly. If the truth was known, he was probably riding carelessly himself. The car got in his way and annoyed him, and if he can persuade himself that he had an encounter with a desperado fleeing from justice, he's not going to stick at remembering a few things that weren't there. There are plenty of people who are always ready to remember more than they saw."

"That's awfu' true," sighed Macpherson.

"I will tell you a thing I like about this theory of Duncan's," said the Fiscal. "It makes it appear likely that the crime was unpremeditated. It is more likely that Graham, coming suddenly upon Campbell like that, should quarrel with him and knock him down than that anybody should contrive a scheme to carry a dead body all those miles and plant it in so awkward a place."

"The place was more or less forced on the murderer, was it not, by Campbell's expressed intention of painting there that day?"

"But he might be supposed to have changed his mind, Sir Maxwell."

"To an innocent man," said Macpherson, acutely, "that supposition wad present no difficulty at all. But a murderer might weel be ower particular, even tae the point o' riskin' the miscarriage of his plans by an unnecessary verisimilitude."

"Well, Inspector," said the Chief Constable, "I can see that you are not altogether satisfied with any of our theories. Let us have yours."

The Inspector brightened. This was his moment. He felt convinced that he, and no other person, had the right sow by the ear, and was, indeed, extremely grateful to Dalziel, Sir Maxwell and Duncan for having produced such inferior animals and refrained from spoiling his market.

"The Sergeant said just noo," said he, "that Jimmy Fleeming was the biggest leear in the Stewartry. Weel, I ken three that's bigger leears than him, an' that's Gowan and his pack of English servants. An' ye'll mind that they three are the only pairsons that's proved oot o' their own mouths tae be leears, exceptin' Strachan an' his bit tale aboot a gowf-ball.

"I believe Gowan killed Campbell when they met on the road, an' I dinna credit one word o' that story aboot his beard.

"Noo, I've written doon the course o' events as I see them, an' I'll ask ye tae read it out for me, Mr. Fiscal, seein' as ye're better accustomed tae speakin' in public than I am."

With these words, the Inspector handed over a neatly-written manuscript which he produced from his breast-pocket, and leaned back with the shy smile of a poet attending a public reading of his own works.

The Fiscal adjusted his glasses and, in a clear voice, proceeded to do justice to —

The Case against Gowan

The evidence of the girl Helen Macgregor is that Campbell met with another motorist, since proved and admitted to be Gowan, on the Gatehouse-Kirkcudbright road at about 9.45 on Monday night. That there was a quarrel, and that one of the parties then placed the inanimate body of the other party in the two-seater car and drove off with it in the direction of Gatehouse. That she then became frightened and ran home. This story was subsequently substantiated by the finding of a spanner, bearing Campbell's finger-prints, close to the locus of the alleged assault, and by the discovery of car-tracks tending to show that a car had been driven into

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a grass lane, through a gate some fifty yards from the said locus.

In my opinion, the crime is to be reconstructed as follows.

Having killed Campbell in the struggle, Gowan's first consideration was to remove the corpse to a place where it would not be seen by a passer-by. This he effected by placing it in his own car, driving up to the gate, and dumping the body inside. He selected his own car for this purpose because it was the nearest to Gatehouse and could be more readily shifted by him. If he had put the body at once in Campbell's car, he would have had to move his own car first, to get the other past, and someone might have arrived while he was so doing. If such a person had found Campbell's car obstructing the road and had ascertained upon investigation that it contained a dead body it would have a very suspicious appearance.

He then brought up Campbell's car, drove it through the gate, placed the body in it and deposited it at some distance up the lane. He then proceeded on foot to his own car, turned it and returned in it to Kirkcudbright. He could accomplish this, driving *like hell* [the last two words were carefully ruled out] in a reckless manner in rather under five minutes. Say at 10.10. The girl Helen saw him when he passed her house.

He would find Hammond on duty and would urge him to return with him at once. On reaching the scene of the crime at, say, 10.20, he would proceed on foot to the Morris car and drive it out of the lane in the direction of Gatehouse, while Hammond would return with the two-seater to Kirkcudbright.

Gowan could be back with the Morris at Standing Stone cottage at, say, 10.30. (Note: Ferguson gives the time as 10.15, but he only says "about.")

Gowan then conceives the plan of simulating an accident to Campbell. Since his black beard would make it impossible to impersonate Campbell, he shaves this off with Campbell's razor, carefully cleaning the same, and destroying the hair in the fire, except a portion which he reserved for another purpose.

When Strachan arrived, Gowan was in hiding some place or other, probably in the garage. On Strachan's departure, he returned to the cottage in a stealthy manner, destroyed the note and proceeded with his preparations.

At 7.30 he would start out with the car, disguised in Campbell's clothes and carrying the corpse, the painting materials and the bicycle, which he would have taken from the Anwoth Hotel. Now we have to account for the long time taken by him to arrive at the New Galloway road, where he was seen by the workman. In my opinion he proceeded to some town or village not yet ascertained, and there instructed Hammond to meet him at some point with the two-seater. In my opinion this would be a locality in the neighbourhood of Pinwherry. Inquiries have been set on foot to trace this telephone message within an area of thirty miles round about Gatehouse.

At this point the Chief Constable interrupted the reading.

"Could not the call be readily traced at the Kirkcudbright end?" he inquired.

"No, no," said Wimsey, before Macpherson could speak. "Hammond would have been instructed to go somewhere else to get it. A desperate fellow like Gowan isn't going to take all this trouble only to trip up on a trifle like a telephone call, eh, Macpherson?"

"That's so," said the Inspector. "That's jist exactly what was in my mind."

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"Then why did he not tell Hammond what to do when they were together, and avoid the telephone call altogether?" demanded Sir Maxwell.

"He hadn't made his plan then," said Wimsey. "How fretful you people are! Do give the man time to think. His first idea is, 'Let's get the body away off this road that I'm known to have driven along. I'll plant it somewhere. I don't know where. I'll think it out and 'phone you to-morrow at 8 o'clock. Go to Lauriston or Twynholm (or Kamschatka or Timbuctoo or whatever was the handiest place) and I'll put the call through to you there.' After all, you've got to explain the delay on the road somehow. Ferguson is a liar, Strachan fell down a mine, Farren—let me see; oh, yes—Farren was a poor hand with a car and Gowan made a telephone call. Please go on with the reading, Fiscal."

Gowan then proceeded to the site on the Minnoch and painted his picture. This would occupy him till about 11.30. He then mounted the bicycle and rode along the road to Pinwherry and Girvan to the spot selected by him. It would be just as he had passed Barrhill that he was observed by Mr. Clarence Gordon. Mr. Gordon said that the bicyclist was not a very tall man, but Gowan would not look so tall if he was bent down over a bicycle and pedalling fast. Without his beard, Gowan would not be recognisable from his photograph. Hammond would meet him with the two-seater some place between Barrhill and Girvan, and he would be provided with any necessary tackle for securing the bicycle to the car. They would drive together to just this side of Girvan, where Hammond would alight, take the bicycle and proceed to Ayr, contriving whether by design or mischance to lose the bicycle in the station. It will be remembered that the person travelling with the bicycle was said to speak like

an Englishman. Gowan then proceeded with the car to some point from which he could write and dispatch his letter to Major Aylwin. He would not wish to make his appearance in Kirkcudbright without his beard so that he probably did not return till that night. Efforts are being made to trace the movements of the car during this period.

With reference to the portions of beard discovered on the Gatehouse-Kirkcudbright road. It would occur to Gowan and his confederates that the fact of murder might be suspected and his own movements investigated. In that case the shaving-off of his beard and his disappearance to London might present a suspicious appearance. They therefore concocted a story to fit the case, and planted the portions of hair by the roadside in order to support this invention. This was the story subsequently told by Gowan at Scotland Yard, which was very misleading, on account of containing so large a proportion of facts. The details of Gowan's escape from Kirkcudbright occurred exactly as related in his statement. This is the case against Gowan as presented by me.

(Signed) JOHN MACPHERSON.

Inspector of Police.

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"Ingenuiser and ingenuiser," said Wimsey. "There are a good many details that need verification, but the whole thing is very pretty indeed. What a shocking set of crooks these English servants are! Not even murder will turn them from their feudal devotion to the man who pays!"

The Inspector flushed.

"Ye're tryin' tae make a fool of me, my lord," he said, reproachfully.

"Indeed, no," replied his lordship. "One thing in your story pleases me particularly, and that is that you have

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bravely tackled the business of the bicycle at Euston, which everybody else has fought shy of."

At this point, Constable Ross cleared his throat in so pointed a manner that everyone turned to look at him.

"I perceive from your manner, Ross," said his lordship, "that to you also the word bicycle has not been devoid of significance. With the permission of these other gentlemen, I should greatly like to hear your version of the matter."

The constable looked at the Chief Constable for his approval, and receiving a nod, embarked upon his theory.

"The thing that's in my mind," said he, "is this man Waters. Here's a man wi' a verra unsatisfactory alibi, which is no capable o' proof. We have not yet established communication wi' this man Drewitt an' his sailing-yacht——"

"Just a moment, Ross," broke in the Chief Constable. "We got a wire in from him this morning from Arisaig. We just missed him at Oban. He wires, 'Waters joined us at Doon 8.30 Tuesday morning. Left yacht Gourrock Saturday. Writing.' He has also, I understand, made a confirmatory statement to the police."

"Ay," said Ross, not in the least disconcerted, "ay, imph'm. But we dinna ken what kind o' a man is this Drewitt. He'll be for backin' up Waters ony gait, tae my thinkin'. He may swear till he's black in the face Waters went aboard at the Doon, but the fact remains that naebody saw him to speak to, an' the bicycle has clean disappeared. In my opinion, yon bicycle is doon in the deep waters betune Arran an' Stranraer, an' ye'll never see it mair till it rises oot o' the sea tae bear witness at the great Day of Judgment. Wi'oot," he added, with some sacrifice of picturesqueness, "ye sairch for't wi' deep-sea tackle."

"What's your idea, then, Ross?"

"Well, Sir Maxwell, 'tis this, an' 'tis awfu' clear an'

simple tae my thinkin'. Here's Campbell, fou' as a puggie an' lookin' for trouble. He has a row wi' Waters an' says it'll no end there. He's aff away to Gatehouse, an' he meets Gowan an' gets the better o' him. 'That's fine,' thinks he, 'it's my night the night.' He's away home an' he gets drinkin' again, and he thinks to 'himsel', 'What for wad I no drag that bastard Waters' (beggin' your pardon) 'oot o' his bed an' finish wi' him now?' He gets his car oot again an' starts away. Ferguson will be asleep an' no hearin' him. He admits 'himsel' he didna hear Strachan gae, an' what for wad he ha' heard Campbell? He drives ower tae Kirkcudbright an' chucks stones at Waters' window. Waters looks oot, sees him an' thinks, 'We'll no have a row in the street.' He lets him in an' they talk a bit, an' yin or 'tither o' them says, 'We'll away up tae the stoojo an' fight it oot.' They do so, an' Campbell's killt.

"Waters is in an' awfu' pickle and doesna ken what tae do. He's comin' oot o' the stoojo in a distracted condition when he meets his friend Drewitt, that's visitin' there wi' his hired car. 'Drewitt,' says he, 'I'm in awfu' trouble. I've killt a man,' he says, 'an' I dinna ken what tae do. It was a fair fight,' he says, 'but they'll bring it in murder an' I'll be hangit.' Then they puts their heids tegither an' makes a plan. Drewitt's away tae Mrs. McLeod's for tae inpairsonate Waters. An' ye'll mind," added Constable Ross, forcibly, "that Mrs. McLeod never set eyes on her lodger fra' the time he went oot a little after midnight. She *heard* him come upstairs, she heard him ca' oot when she brought up the water, an' when she came in fra' the back o' the hoose, he'd eaten his breakfast and away."

"Drewitt would be takin' an awfu' risk," said Macpherson.

"Ay, but murderers maun tak' risks," said Ross. "In the

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meantime, Waters is away wi' Campbell's car an' his bicycle at the same time that Drewitt entered the hoose. Then he does a' the same things as we've suggested for the other suspects. He's away wi' the body at 7.30. I'm thinkin' he'll ha' ta'en the auld road through Gatehouse Station an' he'll maybe have had engine trouble in that lonely place, or burst a tyre an' had tae change the wheel. The road's wicked wi' the ruts and the stones thereabouts. Ony gait, he passes the New Galloway turnin' at 9.35 an' arrives at the Minnoch at 10. He pents his picture, throws the body into the burn and makes off on his bicycle. He has plenty o' time, for he'll no be able tae carry oot the rest o' his plan before nightfall. He hides up in the hills, an' it's here he'll be cursin' himsel', for he'll ha' forgot tae bring wi' him the sandwiches that was found in Campbell's satchel. Ay, he'll be fine an' empty before night. When 'tis safe for him tae move, he rides his bicycle tae the appointed meetin'-place wi' Drewitt.

"Drewitt will ha' been workin' up the coast, like he said. It will ha' been Drewitt as was seen tae go aboard at the Doon, an' after that, the course o' the yacht will agree wi' Waters' statement. In the night, she'll make across fra' Lady Bay tae Finnart Bay, an' pick up Waters that's ridden doon by the high road fra' Pinwherry. They take the bicycle on board an' return tae lie up in Lady Bay. After that they hae only tae carry oot their original sailing plan, an' land Waters at Gourock on Saturday mornin', after sinkin' the bicycle some place where it'll no be easy found. Man! it's as plain as the nose on your face."

"But ——" said the Chief Constable.

"But ——" said the Inspector.

"But ——" said the Sergeant.

"But ——" said Constable Duncan.

"Imph'm," said the Fiscal. "All these theories are very

interesting, gentlemen, but they are all conjectural. I congratulate you all extremely upon your ingenuity and hard work, but to say which theory is the most probable is a harder choice than that between Portia's caskets. It appears to me that all are worth being followed up, and that the next step is to prosecute inquiries which may tend to confirm either one or the other of them. The movements of all cars upon the roads in the district must be checked with the greatest possible care. The man Drewitt must be interviewed and closely questioned, and the persons living about Finnart Bay and Lady Bay must be asked whether they observed anything of the movements of the yacht. At least we can feel certain that one among the five theories presented to us must be the true one, and that is something. Do you not think so, Lord Peter?"

"Yes, Wimsey," said the Chief Constable. "You told the Inspector the other day that you had solved the problem. Are you in a position to give a casting vote? Which of our suspects is the murderer?"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MURDERER

"THIS," SAID LORD PETER WIMSEY, "IS THE PROUDEST moment of my life. At last I really feel like Sherlock Holmes. A Chief Constable, a Police Inspector, a Police Sergeant and two constables have appealed to me to decide between their theories, and with my chest puffed like a pouter-pigeon, I can lean back in my chair and say, 'Gentlemen, you are all wrong.'"

"Damn it," said the Chief Constable, "we can't *all* be wrong."

"You remind me," said Wimsey, "of the steward who said to the Channel passenger, 'You can't be sick here.' You can all be wrong and you are."

"But we've suspected everybody," said Sir Maxwell. "See here, Wimsey, you're not going to turn round now and say that the crime was committed by Mrs. Green or the milkman, or somebody we've never heard of? That would be in the very worst tradition of the lowest style of detective fiction. Besides, you said yourself that the murderer was an artist, and you even picked out those six artists yourself. Are you going back on that now?"

"No," said Wimsey, "I wouldn't do anything quite so mean as that. I'll qualify my original statement. You are all wrong, but one of you is less wrong than the rest. Still none of you has got the right murderer, and none of you has got the whole of the method right, though some of you have got bits of it."

"Don't be portentous and tiresome, Wimsey," said Sir Maxwell. "There is a serious side to this matter. If you possess any information that we do not, you ought to let us have it. In fact, you ought to have let us have it at once, instead of wasting our time like this."

"I did let you have it at once," said Wimsey. "I let you have it on the day of the crime, only you keep on forgetting it. And I haven't really been holding anything up my sleeve. I had to wait till all the suspects were roped in before I could be certain of my theory, because at any moment something might have turned up to unsettle it. And I haven't actually proved it now, though I'll undertake to do it any time you like."

"Come, come," said the Fiscal, "please tell us what it is you're wanting to prove, and you shall be given every opportunity."

"Right-ho! I will be good. Now we'll have to go back to the discovery of the body. The crucial point of the whole problem was there, and I pointed it out to you, Dalziel, and that was the thing that made us sure from the start that Campbell's death was murder and no accident.

"You remember how we found the body. It was lying in the burn, cold and stiff, and on the easel up above there was a picture, half-finished, together with a palette, a satchel and a painting-knife. We went through all the belongings of the dead man, and I said to you, 'There's something missing, and if we can't find it, it means murder.' You remember that, Dalziel?"

"I mind it fine, Lord Peter."

"In Campbell's satchel we found nine tubes of oil colour—vermilion, ultramarine, two chrome yellows, viridian, cobalt, crimson lake, rose madder and lemon yellow. But there was no flake white. Now, as I explained to you at the

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time, it is absolutely impossible for a painter in oils to make a picture without using flake white. It is the fundamental medium which he uses to mix with his other colours to produce various shades of light and shadow. Even a man like Campbell, who used a great deal of pure colour, would as soon think of setting out to paint without flake white as you would set out to catch trout without a cast. And in any case, the proof that Campbell had been using flake white that morning was proved by the picture itself, which contained huge masses of white cloud, wet and fresh and just laid on.

"A glance at the palette confirmed this. It had seven blobs of colour on it, in this order: White, cobalt, viridian, vermilion, ultramarine, chrome yellow and rose madder.

"Well, you know how we searched for that missing tube of colour. We turned out Campbell's pockets, we scoured every inch of the ground and we lifted—or rather, you lifted, because I'd made tracks like a sensible man—every stone in that confounded stream, right down to the bridge. I told you the tube would probably be a big one, but that it might, of course, be nearly empty and therefore rather light. If it had been anywhere about, I think we may take it. that you would have found it."

"Ay," said Dalziel, "ye may confidently assume that, my lord."

"Very well, then. There was, of course, the faint possibility that, after Campbell's death, someone had come up and removed the tube, but we felt that to be too fantastic for consideration. Why should anybody steal just that one thing and nothing else? And then, there was the condition of the body, which suggested that death had occurred a good deal earlier than the amount of work on the picture would lead one to suppose. And by the way, doctor, I may as well relieve your mind and say at once that, in spite of

Duncan's able and ingenious special pleading, your estimate of the time of death was perfectly sound."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Yes. Well, the question was, what had happened to the flake white? Taking all the appearances into consideration, I formed the opinion that (a) Campbell had been murdered, (b) the murderer had painted the picture, (c) he had for some reason taken the flake white away with him.

"Now, why should he take it away? It would be the silliest possible thing for him to do, since its absence would instantly arouse suspicion. He must have taken it by mistake, and that meant that he must have automatically put it in the place where he was accustomed to put tubes of colour while painting. He hadn't put it in any of the ordinary places—on the ground, or in a box, or in the satchel or on the tray attached to the easel. He must have bestowed it about his person somewhere, and a pocket was the likeliest place. So that from that moment I felt we ought to look about for a painter with the untidy habit of dropping paints into his pockets."

"You didn't mention that," said Dalziel, reproachfully.

"No, because I was afraid—forgive me—that if I had, you might possibly go and make inquiries about it, and if once the murderer had his attention drawn to this unfortunate habit of his, there would be an end of the habit and the inquiry. Besides, several painters might have the same habit. Or I might be entirely mistaken about the whole thing—it was a slender clue, and I might be straining it too far. I thought my best plan was to snoop about the studios and watch people at work and find out what their habits were. That was obviously a job which I, as a private person, could do better than any official. But I gave you the pointer, Dalziel, and you put it into your report. Anybody could

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have come to the same conclusion as I did. Why didn't anybody?"

"Never mind why we didn't, Wimsey," said Sir Maxwell. "Go on with your story."

"The next thing," said Wimsey, "was—why all this elaborate fake with the picture? Why should a murderer hang round the place of the crime painting pictures? Obviously, to disguise the fact that Campbell had been killed at—well, whatever time he was killed. Say the previous night. That meant that the murderer hadn't got a good alibi for the previous night or whenever it was. But if he wanted to make it look as though Campbell had been killed that morning, it meant that he must be preparing himself a cast-iron alibi for that particular morning. So I decided that I knew four things about the murderer already: (1) he was an artist, or he couldn't have painted the picture, (2) he had a habit of putting paints in his pocket, (3) he had a weak alibi for the actual time of death, (4) he would have a good alibi for Tuesday morning.

"Then came the discovery of the tar-marks on the car. That suggested that the alibi had somehow been worked out with the aid of a bicycle. But I couldn't get farther than that, because I didn't know when Campbell was killed, or when he was supposed to have started out for the Minnoch, or how long the picture would take to paint, or any details of that kind. But what I did know was that Campbell had been a quarrelsome kind of devil, and that at least six artists in the district had been going about shouting for his blood.

"Now the confusing thing about this case was that of these six artists, five had disappeared. Of course it isn't in the least unusual for five artists to be away from the district at the same time. There was the Exhibition at Glasgow, to which several people had gone, including Ferguson. There

was fishing, which often takes people out at night—there were hundreds of perfectly legitimate things they might have been doing. But the fact remained that those five people were not available for inquiries. You can't sit round and watch a man painting when you don't know where he is. The only man I could get hold of at once was Strachan, and when I came to look into his case, it appeared that his alibi was anything but satisfactory, not only for the Monday night but for the Tuesday morning as well; to say nothing of his having a black eye and a generally dilapidated appearance.

"So that was how the case stood then. Graham, vanished; Farren vanished; Waters vanished; Gowan gone to London; Ferguson, gone to Glasgow; Strachan, at home, but obviously telling lies.

"Strachan, I may say, I almost absolved at once, though I thought it possible that he had some guilty knowledge of some kind. I was looking for a murderer with a good alibi, and Strachan's was about as bad and clumsy as it could be. Graham, Farren and Waters had to wait; they might turn up with excellent alibis; I couldn't tell. Only I had expected something more obvious and immediate. The two most suspicious people, from my point of view, were Ferguson and Gowan, because they had alibis supported by outside people. But if Gowan's alibi was sound, it covered the night as well as the morning; therefore the man who best fulfilled all the conditions was Ferguson. He had an alibi of exactly the kind that I expected. It covered the morning only; it was watertight in every joint; and it was established by people like station-masters and bus-conductors, who could have no possible reason for lying about it. If Ferguson had really travelled by the 9.8 train from Gatehouse to Dumfries, he *could not* have painted the picture.

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" Well, then the rest of the people began to filter along. Graham turned up with no explanation at all, and he gave me a bad jolt; because Graham is the one man of the six who has, not only imagination, but the same *kind* of imagination as my own. I could see Graham working out that train of thought about the alibi and saying to himself that any alibi would be suspect, and that the biggest proof of innocence would be to have none. I believe that at that point I suspected Graham more than anybody else. He said he could imitate Campbell's style of painting—went out of his way to demonstrate it, too. I had an awful feeling that we should never be able to pin Graham down to anything. His manner was perfect. He took exactly the right line about the thing. And he didn't mean to commit himself until he knew what he had got to meet.

" Then Ferguson came back, with plenty of witnesses to show that he had really been to Glasgow, and told us a story which gave us at last a few real times to go upon. I am sure that all the times he gave us were perfectly correct, by the way, and that he didn't fall asleep or miss anything. I barged in on him and studied his method of painting and all that, and got him settled in my mind.

" That was the day we began to get a line on that bicycle business at Ayr. Now, I don't want to be rude to anybody, but I do think that bicycle ought to have been taken into account in any explanation of the crime. The whole affair was so extremely odd that it could hardly be an accident or a coincidence. It didn't throw any light on the personality of the murderer, of course, because, though it was a Gatehouse bicycle, that merely meant that the crime had been worked from Gatehouse, which was overwhelmingly probable in any case. It was a great pity that the unfortunate porter at Girvan should have crocked up when he did. If

he could have identified one of those photographs, he might have spared us a lot of trouble.

"Thursday—what did I do on Thursday? Of course, yes—we got the story of the row on the Gatehouse-Kirkcudbright road, and the spanner and the black hair. We rather tripped up on that, Macpherson. If we'd been a bit quicker, we could have caught Gowan before he eloped and saved several railway-fares to London. It was my fault, because I was taken up with my painting idea, and went round to Bob Anderson's to propose a sort of reconstruction up at the Minnoch. I was going to cart a lot of painters up there and set them to paint in Campbell's manner and see how long it took them. Graham and Strachan and Ferguson were there. They all agreed to try, except that Ferguson thought the idea wasn't in very good taste. But the weather spoilt that plan.

"What happened then? Oh, yes. I went over to the Carrick shore and watched Strachan painting, and he started to knock me into the sea, but thought better of it. By that time it was clear enough that he was either concealing something or shielding somebody, and the probability was that he was mixed up in Farren's disappearance. I'd seen him over at Mrs. Farren's, you know, on the Tuesday night, when I was inspecting Waters' studio and observing what a handy place the lane was for a car-park.

"Saturday, I didn't do much, but Waters came back and we got that remarkable story from Mrs. Smith-Lemesurier. I was still uncertain about Graham. It was far too stupid a story for him to put up, but, as Duncan pointed out, the lady might have lost her head and concocted it without reference to him.

"On Sunday I bullied Mrs. Farren into telling me where to find her husband. I ran him to earth on Monday and

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had a look at his painting methods, just before the official sleuths came along. So now I had only three more of my painters to inspect. After that, the Chief Constable got Strachan's story, but I knew all I needed to know about Strachan by that time.

"My final job was to get hold of Graham and Waters and put them on to copying Campbell's painting. That killed four birds with one stone. It told me how they both used their colours, it gave me the time-factor I wanted to make my theory complete and, as it happened, they gave me, in conversation, the information I wanted about Gowan. That was why, Inspector, I told you that I didn't need to go and see Gowan.

"Now what you are all panting to know is—what did these six people do with their colours?

"Gowan, it appeared, was a fearfully spick and span fellow. He couldn't paint without having everything just so. He had a place for everything and everything in its place. He was the last person in the world to put paints in his pockets. And besides, to tell you the truth, I feel sure that he couldn't have produced that imitation of Campbell's style. He is too set in his methods. Nor do I think he would have the brains to carry out the fake from first to last. All the clever part of his little disappearance was planned and executed by Alcock, who has the makings of a very fine schemer indeed.

"Waters habitually chucks his paints into a satchel. Consequently, with Campbell's satchel handy, he would naturally have chucked them into it. And though he boasted of being able to imitate Campbell, he was slow at copying him, and his imitation was not extraordinarily good. But yet it wasn't bad enough to look like a deliberate attempt to do it badly. And neither he nor Graham looked in the least as

though they had any unpleasant associations with the picture.

"Graham—well, Graham is a very clever man. *He* knew straight away that the painting wasn't Campbell's. He didn't exactly say so, in so many words, but he noticed differences in the style and remarked upon them. That might, of course, have been the culminating point in his scheme of over-reaching me, but I was pretty sure it wasn't. He seemed genuinely puzzled and suspicious. He also said that when painting out of doors, he put his tubes either on the ground or in his hat, and Waters bore him out in this. Neither Graham nor Waters showed any tendency to drop paints into their pockets. I watched them for an hour and a half, without surprising so much as a half-checked movement.

"Farren uses a sketching-box and is particular about putting each tube back in its place immediately after use. I can't say what he would do when he hadn't a box handy, but while I was at Mrs. Farren's I inspected the pockets of his old painting-jacket, and found that they had no tubes in them and no marks of paint on the lining. Besides, I eliminated Farren the moment I found that he had no alibi for Tuesday morning. The whole point of the fake was to support an alibi. If it didn't do that, it wasn't worth doing.

"Strachan lays his colours out on the tray of his easel, always in the same order, and he makes up his palette in a uniform order, too—the order of the spectrum. Now Campbell's palette was not made up like that, and the tubes of paint were all in the satchel—except, of course, the flake white. While watching Strachan, I took the opportunity to abstract a tube of cobalt, but he missed it instantly when he came to pack up, though he was all of a dither at the time, on account of the things I'd been saying to him. *He*

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wasn't the man to go off with an incriminating tube of flake white in his pocket.

"And now we come to Ferguson. Ferguson always puts paints in his pocket; I saw him do it. Ferguson gets his colours from Roberson's, but he had a pound tube of Winsor & Newton on his table; I saw and handled it. It was Ferguson's mania for a particular kind of bluish shadow-tint that puzzled Jock Graham in the faked picture. Ferguson, and nobody else, faked that picture and established that alibi.

"Wait a minute. There are one or two other points about Ferguson that I want to make. He is the one man with the alibi that it was the aim and object of the murderer to establish by means of the fake. He is known to have a remarkable visual memory for details. It was Ferguson who objected to the painting expedition to the Minnoch. And I take off my hat to Sir Maxwell Jamieson for affirming, in the face of all probability, that Ferguson was the man with the special knowledge to produce all the right appearances at the cottage to deceive Mrs. Green."

There was a short silence when Wimsey had finished this long speech, which he delivered with an unaccustomed sobriety of style, and then Sir Maxwell said:

"That is all very well, Wimsey, and it sounds very convincing, but unless you can break down Ferguson's alibi, it goes for nothing at all. We know that he—or somebody—went from Gatehouse to Dumfries with the 9.8 and on to Glasgow. The ticket was clipped at three points on the journey, and given up at Glasgow. And besides, Ferguson was seen at Glasgow by those magneto people, and by Miss Selby and Miss Cochran. Are you suggesting that he had an accomplice to impersonate him, or what?"

"No. He hadn't an accomplice. But he was a student of detective literature. Now, I'll tell you what I propose to do,

with your permission. To-morrow is Tuesday again, and we shall find all the trains running as they did on the morning of the alibi. We will go down to the cottage to-night and reconstruct the whole course of events from beginning to end. I will undertake to show you exactly how the thing was worked. If I break down at any point, then my theory breaks down. But if I get through, I will not only prove that the thing is possible but also that it was done that way."

"Ye canna say fairer than that," said Inspector Macpherson.

"The only thing is," said Wimsey, "that we must get Ferguson out of the way. If he sees what we're doing, he'll bolt."

"Let him," said Macpherson, grimly. "If he bolts, we'll ken fine that he's guilty."

"Good idea," said Wimsey. "Now, look here, we shall want a smallish, heavyish man to be Campbell. All you police blokes are too big. I'm afraid it will have to be you, Sir Maxwell."

"I don't mind," said that stout soldier, gamely, "provided you stop short at throwing me into the burn."

"I won't do that, but you'll have to do some very uncomfortable motoring, I'm afraid. Then we shall want two observers, one to stay with the corpse and the other to keep an eye on me. They will get a lot of strenuous exercise. How about you, Fiscal?"

"No, no," said that gentleman, "I'm over old for traipsing about the country."

"Then it had better be Inspector Macpherson and the Sergeant. You can come as a passenger, Fiscal, if you like. Then we shall want a bicycle, since the real bicycle is still patiently sitting at Euston, waiting for somebody to be fool

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enough to claim it; eggs and bacon for everybody, and an extra car to carry the observers."

The Inspector undertook to procure all the necessary commodities.

"Ross and Duncan," he added, "can watch Ferguson. Ye understand. Whatever place he goes, ye'll shadow him, an' if he tries tae bolt, ye'll arrest him."

"That's the spirit," said Wimsey. "Sir Maxwell, you will start out from Kirkcudbright after the pubs close, and you'll be waiting at the S-bend at 9.45. You, Macpherson, can take the observation car and play Gowan's part in the business, but instead of returning to Kirkcudbright, you will follow the Chief Constable down to Gatehouse, so as to be ready to act Strachan's part when the time comes. You, Dalziel, will cling to me and watch me like a cat watching a mouse-hole. You, Fiscal, will do as you like. And we'll all start by having a very good dinner, for we've got a strenuous bit of work before us."

CHAPTER XXVII

LORD PETER WIMSEY

"HULLO!" SAID FERGUSON.

"Hullo!" said Wimsey. "This is the Procurator-Fiscal and this is Sergeant Dalziel of Newton-Stewart, whom I fancy you've met before. We are making a little experiment in connection with Campbell's death and we want to use your house, if we may. It's a good place to observe from, don't you know."

"I trust we will not be putting you out, Mr. Ferguson," added the Fiscal, courteously.

"Not at all," said Ferguson. "Come in. What exactly do you want to do?"

"We are going to reconstruct the events of the Monday night," said Wimsey, "and we want you to tell us if we go wrong at any point."

"Oh, certainly, with pleasure. When does the show start?"

Wimsey looked at his watch.

"Eight o'clock. It ought to be starting now. Will you do Farren, Dalziel, or shall I? You'd better, because then I can stay here under the Fiscal's eye."

"Verra gude," said Dalziel, and departed.

"Where were you sitting, Ferguson, when Farren arrived?"

"Here," said Ferguson, indicating an arm-chair by the fire.

"Good; then will you sit there again and do whatever

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it was you did that night? The Fiscal shall take the opposite corner and I will sit here between you."

"Who are you supposed to be?" asked Ferguson, with polite interest.

"Nobody just yet. Later on, I'm going to be the murderer. It's one of those things I've always wanted to be. Hullo! that sounds like the racket beginning."

A series of heavy thumps testified to Dalziel's conscientious attack on Campbell's door.

"Carry on, Ferguson," said Wimsey.

Ferguson, his face a little set and pale in the light of the petrol-gas lamp, moved across to the window and drew back the curtain.

"Who's that?" he shouted. "For God's sake stop making that filthy row. Oh, it's you, Farren. What's the matter?"

"Whaur's that —— —— Campbell?" roared the Sergeant at the top of his lungs. "Beggin' yer pardon, sir, but my orders is tae reprojuice the conversation as reported. Where's Campbell gone?"

"Campbell? I haven't seen him all day. I haven't the faintest idea where he is. What do you want him for?"

"I'm wantin' tae twist his guts oot," yelled the Sergeant with relish. "I'll no have the b—— hangin' roond after my wife. Jist yew show me whaur tae find the lousy —— an' I'll blow his bloody brains oot."

"You're drunk," said Ferguson.

"I may be drunk an' I may no be drunk," retorted Dalziel with spirit, "it's no matter to you. I'm not too drunk tae ken a dirty —— when I find him makin' love tae my wife. Where is the bastard?"

"Don't be a fool, Farren. You know perfectly well Campbell's not doing anything of the sort. Pull yourself together and forget it. Go and sleep it off."

"Go an' so-and-so. yerself," vociferated the Sergeant. "Leastways, that's what it's set doon for me tae say. Ye're a couple o' what's-his-names, the baith o' ye!"

"Oh, go and hang yourself!" said Ferguson.

"Ay, that's jist what I'm goin' tae do," said Dalziel. "I'm away tae hang masel' jist noo, but I'll ha'e the life oot o' Campbell first."

"Oh, right-oh! hang yourself by all means, but don't come making that bloody row. Go and do it somewhere else, for Christ's sake."

There was a pause. Ferguson remained at the window. Then a plaintive voice inquired from outside:

"What'll I do now, sir? My directions is tae hang aboot a bit."

"You kick the door violently," said Ferguson, "and walk round to the back and make a noise there. Then you come back and let off a lot of foul language and go off on your bicycle."

"Is that right, sir?"

"Just about right," said Ferguson. "An excellent performance. I congratulate you."

"Will I go away, now?"

"Put the bicycle in its place," said Wimsey, joining Ferguson at the window, "and then come back here."

"Verra gude," said Dalziel. His red tail-lamp moved away to the gate and vanished behind the hedge.

"The worthy Sergeant is enjoying himself," said Ferguson. "His choice of language is not quite as good as Farren's, though."

"Our presence probably cramped his style a bit," said Wimsey. "Eight-fifteen. The next act doesn't take place till after ten. What shall we do, Fiscal? Play cards or tell stories? Or would you like me to read aloud to you? Ferguson has a

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fine collection of detective novels." He strolled over to the shelves. "Hullo, Ferguson, where's that thing of Connington's, *The Two Tickets Puzzle*? I was going to recommend that to the Fiscal. I think he'd like it."

"I've lent it to the padre at the Anwoth," replied Ferguson.

"What a pity! Never mind. Here's an Austin Freeman. He's always sound and informative. Try this one, *The Eye of Osiris*. Great stuff. All about a mummy. Or Kennedy's *Corpse on the Mat*—that's nice and light and cheerful, like its title. Or if you're fed up with murders, try the new Cole, *Burglars in Bucks*."

"Thank you," said the Fiscal, in an austere voice, belied by the twinkle behind his glasses. "I have brought the latest number of *Blackwood* to while away the time."

"Crushed again!" said Wimsey. "Ah! here's Dalziel. Come on, Sergeant. I'll take you on at dominoes for ha'penny points. I'm a great dab at dominoes."

Ferguson took up a book and sat down by the fire. Wimsey produced a box of dominoes from his pocket and slung them out on the table. The Sergeant pulled a chair in beside him. The Fiscal turned over the pages of *Blackwood*.

The silence became oppressive. The flutter of leaves, the click of the dominoes, and the ticking of the clock sounded unnaturally loud. Nine o'clock struck. Wimsey paid the Sergeant fourpence and the game went on.

Ten o'clock struck.

"This is where you start getting ready for bed, isn't it, Ferguson," said Wimsey without taking his eyes from the table.

"Yes." Ferguson pushed back his chair and got up. He wandered round the room, putting away a newspaper here and a book there. Once or twice he dropped things and had

to pick them up. He walked over to the shelf and selected a book, then poured out a glass of whiskey and soda. He drank this slowly, standing by the mantelpiece.

"Do I put out the light?" he asked, when he had finished.

"Did you put out the light?"

"Yes."

"Put it out then."

Ferguson turned off the petrol-gas. The light dimmed and sank. The mantle glowed redly for a moment or two, and faded gradually out.

"Do I go to bed?" came the voice from the dark.

"Did you go to bed?"

"Yes."

"Go to bed then."

Ferguson's footsteps passed slowly out of the door and up the stairs.

"My God," said Wimsey, softly. "I had my revolver ready. Listen!"

The hum of a car came down the lane. It drew nearer, louder. The car was turning in at the gate. The headlights flashed across the window and passed. Wimsey got up.

"Do you hear that, Ferguson?" he called up the stair.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Campbell's car."

"Can you see it?"

"I'm not looking at it. But I know the sound of the engine."

Wimsey went out into the yard. The engine was still running noisily, and the driver appeared to be finding some difficulty in backing into the shed.

"What the bloody hell are you doing, Campbell?"

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shouted Wimsey. "Mind where you're going, you drunken ass. You'll have that wall down again."

The reply was an outburst of very military language. Wimsey retorted, and a handsome slanging-match ensued. Sergeant Dalziel, stealing up the stairs in his stockinged feet, found Ferguson hanging with head and shoulders out of the bedroom window.

The voices of the men wrangling below came up loudly. Then there was a leap and a scuffle. Two dark bodies swayed backwards and forwards. Then came a crash and a heavy fall, followed by a most realistic groan.

"Was that the way it was, Mr. Ferguson?"

Ferguson turned so sharply that he hit his head a crash against the window-frame.

"How you startled me!" he said. "No, not in the least. I heard nothing of that kind. Nothing like that happened at all."

"Och, weel," said the Sergeant philosophically. "We'll maybe be mistaken. An' by the way, Mr. Ferguson, I was tae ask ye no tae gae tae yer bed jist noo, because we'll be wantin' the room for the pairpose of observation."

"What am I to do then?"

"Ye'll jist come doon an' sit wi' the Fiscal in the back room."

"I don't know what you're getting at," said Ferguson, yielding to the Sergeant's clutch upon his arm, "but you've got it all wrong, you know. And if I'm not to get any rest to-night, I think I'd better go over and ask for a bed at the Anwoth."

"That's no a bad idea, sir," replied the Sergeant, "but we'll ask ye tae bide here till 12 o'clock. I'll jist run over tae the hotel an' tell them tae expect ye."

"Oh, I can do that, Sergeant."

"I'll no be pittin' ye tae the trouble, sir," replied Dalziel, politely. He had used his torch to guide them down the stair and now led his victim into the studio, where the Fiscal was once more placidly reading *Blackwood* by the light of a candle.

"Sit ye doon, sir," he urged, pleasantly. "I'll be back in a crack. Ah! here's Inspector Macphairson comin' in wi' the observation car. He'll be company for ye."

In a very few moments the Inspector came in.

"Whit's happened?" asked the Sergeant, eagerly.

"His lordship is carryin' on terrible over the corp," said the Inspector with a grin, "tryin' tae revive it wi' whuskey."

"Will ye bide here a moment, Inspector, while I rin over tae the Anwoth tae bespeak a room for Mr. Ferguson?"

Macpherson glanced from the frail figure of the Fiscal to Ferguson, kneading his handkerchief into a ball between his clammy hands. Then he nodded. The Sergeant went out. There was a long silence.

Sergeant Dalziel went no farther than the gate, where he flashed his torch. The bulky form of Constable Ross rose silently out of the hedge. Dalziel dispatched him to the hotel with a whispered message, and then went to see what was happening in the yard.

Here he found the Chief Constable extended flat on the ground, apparently receiving frantic first aid from Wimsey.

"Is he deid yet?" asked Dalziel sympathetically.

"As mutton," replied the murderer, sadly. "I daresay we ought to have spun the riot out a bit longer, but the great thing is that he's dead. What's the time? Half-past ten. That's good enough. He breathed stertorously for a few minutes, and then, you know, he died. How did Ferguson take it?"

"Badly," replied the Sergeant, "but he denies it."

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"Naturally he would."

"He's away tae the Anwoth for a quiet night."

"Then I hope he'll sleep well. But we shall want him here till 12."

"Ay, I've settled that."

"Good. Carry on now. I'm supposed to be thinking out my plan of escape."

The Sergeant waited for the return of P. C. Ross, and then went back to Ferguson's house to announce that all was well.

"How did your bit go, sir?" he asked the Inspector.

"Fine—the time worked out beautifully. We allowed five minutes for the struggle and five for the hair-cuttin' business."

"Did anyone pass ye?"

"Not a solitary soul."

"That was gude luck. Weel, I'll away tae his lordship."

"Ay."

"But this is all wrong, you know, Inspector," protested Ferguson. "A thing like that couldn't have happened without my hearing it."

"It'll maybe have taken place in the road," said the Inspector, diplomatically, "but it's mair convenient tae du't in private."

"Oh, I see."

The Sergeant returned to the yard to find Wimsey laboriously hoisting the Chief Constable on his back. He carried the inert body into the garage and dumped it on the floor, rather heavily. "Hi!" said the corpse. "You shut up," said Wimsey, "you're dead, sir. I couldn't drag you. It might leave marks."

He stood looking down on the body.

"No blood," he said, "thank God there's no blood. I'll

do it. I must do it. I must think, that's all. Think. I might pretend to be out fishing. But that's no good. I've got to have a witness. Suppose I just leave him here and pretend that Farren did it. But Farren may have gone home. He'll be able to prove he wasn't here. Besides, I don't want to get Farren into trouble if I can help it. Can't I make it look like an accident?"

He went out to the car.

"Better put this in," he said, "Farren might come back. If he does, I've got him. Or he's got me. One or the other. No, that won't do. Anyway, I can't count on it. The accident's the thing. And an alibi. Wait!"

He backed the car into the garage and switched the lights out.

"Whiskey's the next move, I think," said he. He picked up the bottle from where he had left it. "Probably, Dalziel, I did my thinking in the cottage, but just for the moment I'll do it in the garage. I'll just fetch a couple of glasses and the water-jug."

A smothered shout from the garage indicated at this point that the corpse was growing restive.

"All right, corpse," yelled Wimsey, cheerfully, "I'm getting drinks."

He fetched the glasses and the water, Dalziel moving dog-like at his heels, and brought the whole consignment back to the garage.

"We'll all have a drink," he said. "Corpse, you may sit up. Now, listen. It's difficult for me to think this plan out aloud now, because I know beforehand what it's going to be. But I know that when I was detecting it, it took me about an hour to hit on the general outline of it, and a bit more to fill in the details. So we'll give Ferguson all that time to play with. At about half-past eleven I shall begin to get to

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work. Meanwhile I think I'll make out a list of the things I've got to do. It would be fatal to forget anything."

He switched on the lights again, then switched them off.

"Better not do that. Can't run the risk of letting the batteries run down. Lend me your torch, Dalziel. I don't want to do it at the cottage, under Ferguson's nose. He might, of course, betray himself and confess, but he might not. Besides, I'd rather he didn't really. I've set my heart on this reconstruction."

He pulled a notebook out of his pocket and began to write. The Chief Constable and the Sergeant passed the whiskey bottle from hand to hand and conversed in whispers. Eleven o'clock struck from the church tower. Wimsey went on writing. At a quarter-past eleven he read his notes through very carefully and stowed them away in his pocket. After ten minutes more, he stood up.

"I'm supposed to have made my plans now," he said, "more or less, that is. Now I've got to start work. I've got to sleep in two beds to-night, so I'll start with Ferguson's. Dalziel, you must be getting ready to be Strachan."

The Sergeant nodded.

"And the corpse had better stay here. Cheerio, folks. Leave a drink or two in the bottle for me."

The corpse and the Sergeant stood for a moment at the door and watched Wimsey's dark figure cross the yard. It was dark, but not pitch-dark, and they saw him slip through the door. Presently the light of a candle flickered in the bedroom. Dalziel moved away, got into the observation car and started it up.

"Ferguson!"

Wimsey's voice sounded a little hoarse. Ferguson rose and went to the foot of the stairway.

"Come up here."

Ferguson went up, rather reluctantly, and found Wimsey with his shoes off, and in his shirt-sleeves standing by the bed.

"I'm going to lie down and have a rest. I want you to wait here with me till something happens."

"This is a silly game."

"It is, rather, I'm afraid. But you'll soon be out of it."

Wimsey got into bed and drew the clothes over him. Ferguson took a chair by the window. Presently the noise of an approaching car was heard. It stopped at the gate, and footsteps passed hurriedly across the yard.

Knock, knock, knock.

Wimsey consulted his watch. Ten minutes after midnight. He got out of bed and stood close behind Ferguson, almost touching him.

"Look out of window, please."

Ferguson obeyed. A dark form stood on Campbell's threshold. It knocked again, stepped back and looked up at the windows, walked round the house and came round to the door again. Then it moved aside and seemed to fumble behind the window shutter. Then came the scrape of a key being fitted into a lock. The door opened, and the figure went in.

"Is that right?"

"Yes."

They watched again. There came a flash of light on the side window of the downstairs room. Then it passed away and presently appeared in the bedroom, the window of which faced Campbell's. It moved as though it were being flashed about the room; then vanished. After a little time it reappeared downstairs and remained stationary.

"Is that right?"

"Not quite. It was matches, not a torch."

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"I see. How did you know that, by the way? I thought you only heard this person come and didn't see anything."

He heard the hiss of Ferguson's breath. Then:—

"Did I say that? I didn't mean to give quite that impression. I heard the door open and saw the light upstairs. But I didn't actually see the person who came."

"And you didn't see him come out again?"

"No."

"And you had no idea who it was?"

"No."

"And you saw nobody else that night?"

"Nobody."

"And you saw Campbell go off in his car at 7.30 next morning?"

"Yes."

"Right. Then you can hop it now, if you want to."

"Well, I think I will. . . . I say, Wimsey!"

"Yes?"

"Oh, nothing! Good night!"

"Good night."

"He nearly told me then," said Wimsey. "Poor devil!"

Ferguson went out of the house and out of the gate. Two stealthy shadows crept out from the hedge and followed him.

Wimsey waited at the window till he saw Dalziel leave the next-door cottage and carefully lock the door behind him, replacing the key in its hiding-place. When the hum of the car had died away in the distance, he ran hastily down the stairs, and across to the garage.

"Corpse!" he cried.

"Yessir!" said the corpse, smartly.

"While that ghastly blighter was nosing round—I—in my rôle as murderer, you understand—had an awful thought.

All this time you're getting stiff. If I leave you like that I shall never be able to pack you into the back of the car. Come out, sir, and be arranged in a nice hunched-up position."

"Don't you dump me in the car earlier?"

"No, or you wouldn't look natural. I lay you out on the floor to set. Now, where's that blighter Dalziel? I hope he hasn't buzzed zealously off to Falbae. No. Here he comes. Dalziel, help me to arrange the corpse exactly as it looked when it was found. It had the arms folded round in front, I think, and the head tucked down on them—no! not as far as that—we mustn't cover up the bruise on the temple. That's here. Now the legs bundled up sideways. Right. Hold that. That's beautiful."

"Do I stay like this all night?" asked Sir Maxwell, dolefully.

"No—but remember the pose. We shall want it to-morrow. We'll consider that done. Now we lock the garage door and take the key, for fear of other visitors. Now we go across to Campbell's place. Hullo, Fiscal! come to see the fun? And Macpherson? That's the ticket.

"Now we find the key and open the door, locking it, I think, behind us. We shut the shutters and light up. My God! what's this? A note. *Look out for F.* Great Jehoshaphat!—Oh, no, of course, it doesn't mean me—it means Farren. Now—do we use that or destroy it? Better destroy it. It's an accident we're staging, not a murder. We don't want the slightest suggestion of violence. Besides—must be decent to Farren. Campbell is alive till 7.30 to-morrow, so he found this and read it. When did he come in, though? After 12, of course, since Strachan can say he wasn't here earlier. Yes, but how do I know how many people saw him come in at 10.15? Must say one thing or the other. Better suggest he came in

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and then went out again while I was asleep. On foot, perhaps, so that I didn't hear the car. Damn Strachan! What did he want to come poking his nose in for, anyhow?

"Well, now—Campbell's bed and Campbell's pyjamas. I don't think we put on the pyjamas. We shake them out—Tuesday's wash-day, so they've had a week's use, and we've only got to sprawl them about on the floor to make 'em look natural. Basin—dirty water—wash the hands and face. That does that and leaves the towel untidy. Bed. Must get into that. Horrid business, lying in bed when you can't and mustn't sleep, but it's got to be done. And one can think.

"One can read, too. I've provided some literature. Got it out of Ferguson's place just now. L.M.S. Time-table. Great work of literature. Style slightly telegraphic, but packed with interest. Road-map, too, also from next-door. Does the bed look sufficiently tousled yet? No, I'll give it half an hour—rather a restless half-hour, I'm afraid."

The restless half-hour over, the murderer crawled out of bed, dragging half the clothes with him.

"I think that's fairly convincing. Now. Throw dirty water into slop-pail and dirty a fresh lot. Shaving brush? Tooth-brush? Damn it, no. Must do them later on, or they'll dry up. But I can go down and pack up the painting kit and lay two breakfast-tables. And meanwhile, you know, I can still be thinking out my plan. There's a horrible hole in it at present, and one place where I simply must trust rather to luck. By the way, my present intention, I may tell you, is to catch the 12.35 at Barrhill. But that absolutely depends on my getting away in good time from the Minnoch. Let's pray there won't be many people about."

"But ye didna gae tae Barrhill."

"No; I think something happened to make me change my mind." Wimsey was busily sorting out crockery. "You'll

remember that my overmastering necessity is to get to Glasgow somehow. I have announced my intention of going, and I shall be feeling morbidly nervous about making any change of plan. If you only knew how my brain is spinning at the moment. There! there's Campbell's breakfast all laid out ready: tea-pot, cup and saucer, two plates, knife, fork, bread, butter, sugar. Milk! I must remember to take Campbell's milk in in the morning, by the way; I know when to expect it, you see. Eggs, rasher and frying-pan laid out in the kitchen. Now, over to my own house. Same business here. I believe I had kippers for breakfast actually, but it doesn't matter. For my own convenience I will make it a boiled egg."

He chattered on as he laid the breakfast-materials out. Then suddenly, as though struck by a sudden thought, he dropped the saucepan on the kitchen floor.

"Curse it! I was nearly forgetting. All this alibi depends on my going by train from Gatehouse. But I told a whole lot of people yesterday that I was going to drive to Dumfries and take the 7.35 train from there. Why should I change my mind? It will look so funny. The car. Something wrong with the car. Something the local people can't be supposed to put right in a hurry. Of course—mag. trouble. Yes—I can work that, and it'll probably help my alibi, too. Steady, old man. Loads of time. Be sure you finish one thing properly before you start another. Right. Breakfast's ready. Now then. I've done my bed, but I haven't done the water and things. Do that now. Pyjamas—there! One lot dirty water. Two lots dirty water. Happy thought. Clean socks and shirt to go to Glasgow in, and respectable suit. You must imagine that I'm doing all this. Must be a gray flannel suit, to match those bags of Campbell's. Here it is, as a matter of fact, hanging up. I won't put it on, but we might have a look at the pockets. Hullo, Macpherson, here you are! See the smear of white

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paint on the lining of the left-hand jacket pocket? Careless, careless. A little benzine rids us of this guilt. Well, well, well."

He went swiftly through the motions of changing his garments, while the police, with satisfaction, examined the grey flannel jacket. Play-acting was all very well, but this had the appearance of solid evidence.

Presently Wimsey indicated that the change of clothes was supposed to be accomplished.

"I am spending the night in Glasgow," he went on, "so I must pack an attaché-case. Here it is. Clean pyjamas, shaving-tackle, toothbrush. Better shave now, to save time. Five minutes for a shave. In they go. What else? Oh, a burberry. Absolutely essential. But I shall want to use that first. And a soft felt hat. *Voilà!* A clean collar, no doubt. There it is. And the magneto will have to go in. That will just about fill the case. Now we go over the way again."

He led them back to Campbell's cottage, where, after putting on a pair of thin gloves, he carefully checked and repacked all the articles contained in Campbell's painting-outfit, which had been brought over by Dalziel from the police-station for that purpose.

"Campbell would take some grub with him," observed the murderer thoughtfully. "I'd better cut some. Here is a ham in the cupboard. Bread, butter, ham, mustard. And a small whiskey-flask, considerably left in full view. I think I shall be right in filling it up. Splendid. Now we go out and detach the mag. from our own car. Gently does it. Up she comes. Now we've got to damage her somewhere. I won't do it really, but we'll suppose it done. Wrap her up neatly in brown paper. Careful man, Ferguson. Always keeps odd bits of string and paper and stationery handy in case they're wanted. Right. Now we'll put this in the attaché-case so

that we don't forget it. We shall want an extra cap for when we cease to be Campbell. We'll put that in the pocket of Campbell's cloak. Oh, yes. And this pair of spectacles will be a good aid to disguise. They're Campbell's, but happily they are just sun-glare glasses with plain lenses so that's O.K. We'll put those in our pocket. Now then, we're all fit and ready.

"Now comes the moment when we have to trust to a stroke of luck. We've got to go out and find a bicycle. It may take a bit of time, but the odds are that if it isn't down one close it'll be down the next. Put out the lights. Lock both doors and take the keys away. We can't risk any more Strachans paying visits while we're away."

Suiting the action to the words, Wimsey left the cottages and walked briskly away down the road, closely followed by his observers. "I told you there'd be walking exercise," said Wimsey. "You people had better take the car. I shall have the bike to come back on."

As the cortège arrived opposite the Anwoth Hotel, a bulky form came cautiously up to meet it.

"He's in there, all right," said P. C. Ross. "Duncan's watching the other entrance and we've got the Gatehouse policeman sittin' in the back garden tae see that he doesna get oot by the windows. Here's your bicycle, my lord."

"Wonderful!" said Wimsey. "Hit it the very first shot. Anybody'd think it had been left there on purpose. No"—as the constable obligingly struck a match. "No lights. I'm supposed to be stealing this, my dear man. Good night—or rather, good morning. Wish us luck."

It was a little after two when Wimsey got back to the cottages with the bicycle.

"Now," he said, when he had deposited the bicycle in the

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garage, "we can have a rest. Nothing further happens till about 5 o'clock."

The conspirators accordingly rolled themselves up in rugs and coats and disposed themselves on chairs and hearth-rugs, the couch being voted to the Fiscal in right of seniority.

The Chief Constable, being an old soldier, slept promptly and soundly. He was awakened a little before five by a clashing of pots and pans.

"Breakfast for the observers is served in the kitchen," said Wimsey's voice in his ear. "I am going up to finish off the bedrooms."

At a quarter-past five this job was finished, Campbell's toothbrush and shaving-brush and both sets of soap and towels left wet and the proper appearances produced. Wimsey then came in to cook and eat his solitary eggs and bacon in Campbell's front room. The tea-pot was left on the hob to keep warm.

"I don't know," said Wimsey, "whether he left the fires going or re-lit them. He did one or the other, and it doesn't matter a hoot. Now, corpse, it's time I packed you into the car. I probably did it earlier, but you'd have been so uncomfortable. Come and take up your pose again, and remember you're supposed to be perfectly rigid by now."

"This may be fun to you," grumbled Sir Maxwell, "but it's death to me."

"So it is," said Wimsey. "Never mind. Ready? Up you go!"

"Eh!" said Macpherson, as Wimsey seized the Chief Constable's cramped and reluctant body and swung it into the back seat of the Morris, "but your lordship's wonderful strong for your size."

"It's just a knack," said Wimsey, ruthlessly ramming his victim down between the seat and the floor. "I hope you

aren't permanently damaged, sir. Can you stick it?" he added, as he pulled on his gloves.

"Carry on," said the corpse, in a muffled voice.

Wimsey slung in the painting outfit—stool, satchel and easel—followed it with Campbell's cloak and hat, and piled the bicycle on top, securing it with a tow-rope which he produced from a corner of the garage, and tucking a large rug round and over his awkward load.

"We'll let the easel stick out a bit," he remarked. "It looks innocent and explains the rest of the load. Is that right? What's the time?"

"A quarter to six, my lord."

"Right; now we can start."

"But ye've no eaten Ferguson's breakfast, my lord."

"No; that comes later. Wait a bit. We'd better lock the doors again. Right-ho!"

He drew a cloth cap closely down upon his head, muffled himself unrecognisably in a burberry and muffler, and climbed into the driving-seat.

"Ready? Right. Let her go!"

The car with its burden moved gently out into the pale light of the morning. It bore round to the right at the end of the lane and took the direction of Gatehouse Station. The observation car swung in behind and followed it.

Upwards the road climbed steadily, mounting triumphantly past the wooded beauty of Castramont, ever higher over the lovely valley of the Fleet. Through the trees and out on to the lofty edge of the moor, with the rolling hills lifting their misty heads upon the right. Past the quarry and up still farther to the wide stretch of heather and pasture. Sheep stared at them from the roadside, and scurried foolishly across their path. Partridges, enjoying their last weeks of security, rose whirring and clattering from among the ling.

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Over to the northeast, white in the morning, the graceful arches of the Fleet viaduct gleamed pallidly. And ahead, grim and frowning, stood the great wall of the Clints of Dromore, scarred and sheer and granite-grey, the gate of the wilderness and guardian-barrier of the Fleet.

The little cottage by the level crossing seemed still asleep and the gates stood open. The cars passed over the line and, avoiding the station entrance, turned sharp away to the left, along the old road to Creetown. Here, for some distance, the way was flanked on either side by a stone wall, but, after a few hundred yards, the walls came to a stop. Wimsey held up a warning hand, stopped, turned his car, with some bumping, over the grass, and drove it well behind the shelter of the wall on the left. The police-car halted in the middle of the road.

"What noo?" asked Macpherson.

Wimsey alighted and peered cautiously under the rug.

"Still alive, Sir Maxwell?"

"Only just."

"Well, I think you might come out now and have a stretch. You won't be needed again till 9 o'clock. Sit down comfortably with the Fiscal and have a smoke."

"And what do the others do?"

"They walk back with me to Gatehouse," said Wimsey, with a grim smile.

"Mayn't we bring the car?" said Macpherson, mournfully.

"You can if you like, but it would be more sporting to cheer me with a little pleasant conversation. Damn it! I've got to walk."

Eventually it was arranged that Macpherson should walk with Lord Peter, while Dalziel brought the car along behind in case the station-omnibus proved to be crowded. Telling

the Fiscal to see that the corpse behaved itself, Wimsey waved a cheerful hand and started off with Macpherson to trudge the six-and-a-half miles back to Gatehouse.

The last mile was the most awkward, for the road was getting busy, and they had to be continually diving over walls and under hedges to avoid observation. At the last moment they were nearly caught in the lane by the paper-boy, who passed, whistling, within a foot of them while they crouched behind a convenient hawthorn-bush.

"Damn the paper-boy," said Wimsey. "Ferguson, of course, would have been expecting him. In any case, he probably did all this earlier, but I didn't want to keep the corpse out all night. A quarter to eight. We've cut it rather fine. Never mind. Here goes."

They took the remainder of the lane at a run, unlocked Campbell's door, hid the key, performed the motions of taking in the milk and emptying part of it down the sink, took in and opened letters and newspapers, and dashed back to Ferguson's cottage. Here Wimsey took in Ferguson's milk, boiled his egg and made his tea, and sat down to his breakfast with an air of simple enjoyment.

At 8 o'clock, the rotund form of Mrs. Green was seen waddling down the lane. Wimsey looked out of the window and waved a friendly hand to her.

"Better warn her, Macpherson," he said. "If she goes into Campbell's place, she'll have a fit."

Macpherson hurried out, and was seen to vanish into the next-door cottage with Mrs. Green. Presently he returned, smiling broadly.

"Verra gude, my lord," he said, "she's tellt me it a' luiks fine; jist precisely as it did the mornin' Campbell was missin'."

"Good," said Wimsey. He finished his breakfast, packed

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the burberry into the attaché-case, and made a tour of inspection round the house, to make sure that nothing looked suspicious. With the exception of the mysterious remains of four extra breakfasts in the kitchen, everything seemed normal. He strolled out, met Mrs. Green in the front of the cottages, had a word with her, mentioned that he was catching the station 'bus and strolled down to the end of the lane.

Shortly after 8.30, the pant of the omnibus was heard coming along the road. Wimsey flagged it and got in. The police car followed on behind, much to the interest of the other passengers in the omnibus.

At 9 o'clock, or a little after, 'bus and car drew up in the station yard. Wimsey alighted and came across to the car.

"I want you, Inspector, to come across to the train with me. When the train has gone, come out and join Dalziel here. Then get out on to the road and pick up the other car."

The two officers nodded, and Wimsey strolled into the station with the Inspector at his heels. He spoke to the station-master and booking-clerk and bought a first-class return to Glasgow. After a few minutes, the train was signalled, and a general exodus took place to the opposite platform. The station-master marched across, carrying the staff under his arm; the signalman came down from his lofty perch and crossed also, to perform the duties of a porter. The passengers from the 'bus streamed across the line, followed by the 'bus-conductor on the lookout for return passengers with parcels. The booking-clerk retired into his office and took up a paper. Wimsey and the Inspector crossed over with the other passengers.

The train came in. Wimsey wrung the Inspector's hand affectionately, as though he were not going to see him again for a month, and stepped into the first-class compartment which the porter was holding open for him. The station-

master exchanged staffs and a pleasantry or two with the guard. A crate of poultry was wheeled along and dumped into the van. It suddenly occurred to Macpherson that this was all wrong. He ought to have been travelling with Wimsey. He darted to the carriage-window and looked in. The compartment was empty. The whistle blew. The guard waved his flag. The porter, with great bustle, urged Macpherson to "stand away." The train moved out. Macpherson, left gazing up and down the line, perceived that it was empty.

"By God!" said Macpherson, slapping his thigh. "In at one side and oot at t'ither. The auldest dodge in the hail bag o' tricks."

He ran precipitately across the line and joined Dalziel.

"The cunning wee b ——!" he exclaimed affectionately. "He's did it! Did ye see him come across?"

Dalziel shook his head.

"Is that what he did? Och, the station buildin's is between us. There's a path through the station-master's garden. He'll ha' come by that. We'll best be movin'."

They passéd up the station entrance and turned along the road. In front of them went a small grey figure, walking briskly. It was then ten minutes past nine.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LORD PETER WIMSEY

THE CORPSE WAS REPACKED INTO THE CAR. WIMSEY PUT on Campbell's hat and cloak, again wrapping a muffler closely about his chin so that very little of his features was visible beneath the flapping black brim. He backed the car out on to the road and drove gently away towards Creetown. The road was stony, and Wimsey knew that his tyres were a good deal worn. A puncture would have been fatal. He kept his speed down to a cautious twenty miles an hour. He thought as he drove how maddening this slow progress must have been to Ferguson, to whom time had been so precious. With a real corpse in the back seat, it must have been a horrible temptation to go all out, at whatever risk.

The road was completely deserted, except for the wee burn which chuckled along placidly beside them. Once he had to get down to open a gate. The burn, deserting the right-hand side of the road, ran under a small bridge and reappeared on their left, glimmering down over stones to meander beneath a clump of trees. The sun was growing stronger.

Between twenty and twenty-five minutes past nine they came down at the head of the steep little plunge into Creetown, opposite the clock-tower. Wimsey swung the car out to the right into the main road, and encountered the astonished gaze of the proprietor of the Ellangowan Hotel, who was talking to a motorist by the petrol-pump. For a moment he stared as though he had seen a ghost—then he caught

sight of Macpherson and Dalziel, following in the second car with the Fiscal, and waved his hand with an understanding smile.

"First incident not according to schedule," said Wimsey. "It's odd that Ferguson shouldn't have been seen at this point—especially as he would quite probably have liked to be seen. But that's life. If you want a thing, you don't get it."

He pressed his foot on the accelerator and took the road at a good thirty-five miles an hour.

Five miles farther on, he passed the turn to the New Galloway road. It was just after half-past nine.

"Near enough," said Wimsey to himself. He kept his foot down and hurried along over the fine new non-skid surface which had just been laid down and was rapidly making the road from Creetown to Newton-Stewart one of the safest and finest in the three kingdoms. Just outside Newton-Stewart, he had to slow down to pass the road-engine and workers, the road-laying having now advanced to that point. After a brief delay, bumping over the new-laid granite, he pushed on again, but instead of following the main road, turned off just before he reached the bridge into a third-class road running parallel to the main road through Minnigaff, and following the left bank of the Cree. It ran through a wood and past the Cruives of Cree, through Longbaes and Borgan, and emerged into the lonely hill-country, swelling with green mound after green mound, round as the hill of the King of Elfland; then a sharp right-hand turn and he saw his goal before him—the bridge, the rusty iron gate, and the steep granite wall that overhung the Minnoch.

He ran the car up upon the grass and got out. The police-car drew up into the shelter of a little quarry on the opposite side of the road. When the observers came up with him,

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Wimsey was already rolling back the rug and pulling out the bicycle.

"Ye've made verra gude time," observed the Inspector. "It's jist on 10 o'clock."

Wimsey nodded. He ran up on to the higher ground and surveyed the road and the hills to left and right. Not a soul was to be seen—not so much as a cow or a sheep. Though they were only just off a main road and a few hundred yards from a farm, the place was as still and secret as the heart of a desert. He ran down again to the car, flung the painting-kit upon the grass, opened the door of the tonneau and clutched ruthlessly the huddled form of the Chief Constable, who, more dead than alive after his disagreeable journey, hardly needed to feign the stiffness which was cramping him in every limb. Hoisted in a dismal bundle on Wimsey's back, he made the last lurching stage of his progress, to be dumped with a heavy thud on the hard granite, at the edge of the incline.

"Wait there," said Wimsey, in a menacing tone, "and don't move, or you'll fall into the river."

The Chief Constable dug his fingers into a bunch of heather and prayed silently. He opened his eyes, saw the granite sloping sharply away beneath him, and shut them again. After a few minutes, he felt himself enveloped in a musty smother of rug. Then came another pause, and the sound of voices and heartless laughter. Then he was deserted again. He tried to imagine what was happening and guessed, rightly, that Wimsey was secreting the bicycle somewhere. Then the voices came back, and a few muttered curses suggested that somebody was setting up an easel with unpractised hands. More laughter. Then the rug was twitched from his head and Wimsey's voice announced, "You can come out now."

Sir Maxwell retreated cautiously on hands and knees from the precipice, which, to his prejudiced eyes, appeared to be about two hundred feet in depth, rolled over and sat up.

"Oh, God!" he said, rubbing his legs. "What have I done to deserve all this?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Wimsey. "If you had been really dead, you know, you wouldn't have noticed it. But I didn't like to go as far as that. Well, now we've got an hour and a half. I ought to paint the picture, but, as that is beyond me, I thought we might have a little picnic. There's some grub in the other car. They're just bringing it up."

"I could do with something to drink," said Sir Maxwell.

"You shall have it. Hullo! Somebody's coming. We'll give them a start. Get under the rug again, sir."

The distant clack of a farm-lorry was making itself heard in the distance. The Chief Constable hurriedly snatched up the rug and froze. Wimsey sat down before the easel and assumed brush and palette.

Presently the lorry loomed into sight over the bridge. The driver, glancing across with natural interest at the spot where the tragedy had taken place, suddenly caught sight of the easel, the black hat and the conspicuous cloak. He gave vent to one fearful yell and rammed his foot down on the accelerator. The lorry went leaping and crashing forward, scattering the stones right and left in its mad progress. Wimsey laughed. The Chief Constable sprang up to see what was happening and laughed too. In a few minutes the rest of the party joined them, so agitated with laughter that they could scarcely hold the parcels they were carrying.

"Och, mon!" said Dalziel, "but that was grand! That was young Jock. Did ye hear the skelloch he let oot? He's away noo tae tell the folks at Clauchaneasy that auld Campbell's ghaist is sittin' up pentin' pictures at the Minnoch."

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"I trust the poor lad will come to no harm with his lorry," observed the Fiscal. "He appeared to me to be driving at a reckless pace."

"Never mind him," said the Chief Constable. "Lads like that have nine lives. But I'm dying of hunger and thirst, if you are not. Half-past five is a terrible hour for breakfast."

The picnic was a cheerful one, though it was a little disturbed by the return of Jock, supported by a number of friends, to view the phenomenon of a ghost in broad daylight.

"This is getting rather public," said Wimsey.

Sergeant Dalziel grunted, and strode down to warn the spectators off, his stalwart jaws still champing a wedge of veal and ham pie. The hills returned to their wonted quiet.

At 11.25 Wimsey rose regretfully.

"Corpse-time," he said. "Here, Sir Maxwell, is the moment when you go bumpety-bump into the water."

"Is it?" said the Chief Constable. "I draw the line there."

"It would make you rather a wet-blanket on the party," said Wimsey. "Well, we'll suppose it done. Pack up, you languid aristocrats, and return to your Rolls-Royce, while I pant and sweat upon this confounded bicycle. We had better take away the Morris and the rest of the doings. There's no point in leaving them."

He removed Campbell's cloak and changed the black hat for his own cap, then retrieved the bicycle from its hiding-place, and strapped the attaché-case to the carrier. With a grunt of disgust he put on the tinted spectacles, threw his leg across the saddle and pedalled furiously away. The others packed themselves at leisure into the two cars. The procession wound out upon the Bargrennan road.

Nine and a half miles of crawling in the wake of the

bicycle brought them to Barrhill. Just outside the village, Wimsey signalled a halt.

"Look here," said he. "Here's where I have to guess. I guess that Ferguson meant to catch the 12.35 here, but something went wrong. It's 12.33 now, and I could just do it. The station is just down that side-road there. But he must have started late and missed it. I don't know why. Listen! There she comes!"

As he spoke, the smoke of the train came in view. They heard her draw up into the station. Then, in a few minutes, she panted away again.

"Well on time," said Wimsey. "Anyway, we've missed her now. She's a local as far as Girvan. Then she turns into an express, only stopping at Maybole before she gets to Ayr. Then she becomes still more exalted by the addition of a Pullman Restaurant Car, and scorns the earth, running right through to Paisley and Glasgow. Our position is fairly hopeless, you see. We can only carry on through the village and wait for a miracle."

He remounted and pedalled on, glancing back from time to time over his shoulder. Presently, the sound of an overtaking car made itself heard. An old Daimler limousine, packed with cardboard dress-boxes, purred past at a moderate twenty-two or three miles an hour. Wimsey let it pass him, then, head down and legs violently at work, swung in behind it. In another moment, his hand was on the ledge of the rear window, and he was free-wheeling easily in its wake. The driver did not turn his head.

"A-ah!" said Macpherson. "It's our friend Clarence Gordon, by Jove! And him tellin' us he'd passed the man on the road. Ay, imph'm, an' he wad be tellin' nae mair nor less than the truth. We'll hope his lordship's no killt."

"He's safe enough," said the Chief Constable, "provid-

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ing his tyres hold out. That's a very long-headed young man, for all his blether. At this rate, we'll be beating the train all right. How far is it to Girvan?"

"About twelve miles. We ought tae pass her at Pinmore. She's due there at 12.53."

"Let's hope Clarence Gordon keeps his foot down. Go gently, Macpherson. We don't want to overtake him."

Clarence Gordon was a careful driver, but acted nobly up to expectation. He positively put on a spurt after passing Pinwherry, and as they attacked the sharp rise to Pinmore, they caught sight of the black hinder-end of the train labouring along the track that ran parallel and close to the road. As they topped the hill, and left the train behind them, Wimsey waved his hat. They span merrily along, bearing to the left and winding down towards the sea. At five minutes past one, the first houses of Girvan rose about them. The pursuers' hearts beat furiously as the train now caught them up again on their right and rushed past them towards Girvan Station. At the end of the town, Wimsey let go his hold on the car, sprinting away for dear life to the right down the station road. At eight minutes past he was on the platform, with three minutes to spare. The police force, like the ranks of Tuscany, could scarce forbear to cheer. Leaving Dalziel to arrange for the safe keeping of the cars, Macpherson ran to the booking office and took three first-class tickets to Ayr. As he passed Wimsey on the platform, he saw him unstrapping the attaché-case and heard him cry to the porter in an exaggerated Oxford accent: "Heah! portah! label this bicycle for Ayr." And as he turned away from the booking-window, the porter's urgent voice came right in his ear:

"One first and a bicycle-ticket to Ayr, and make it quick, laddie. I must be gettin' back tae my gentleman."

They tumbled out on to the platform. The bicycle was being bundled into the rear van. They leapt for their carriage. The whistle blew. They were off.

"Gosh!" said Wimsey, wiping his face. And then: "Damn this thing, it's like a fly-paper."

In his left hand, concealed by the hat which he had removed for the sake of coolness, he held something which he now displayed with a grin. It was a luggage-label for Euston.

"Simple as shelling peas," he said, laughing. "I pinched it while he was wheeling the bike off to the van. All ready gummed, too. They do things handsomely on the L.M.S. Fortunately the pigeon-hole was labelled, so I didn't have to hunt for it. Well, that's that. Now we can take a breather. There's nothing else till we get to Ayr."

After a stop at Maybole to collect the tickets, the train ran merrily along to Ayr. Almost before it drew up at the platform, Wimsey was out of the train. He ran back to the rear van, with Macpherson hurrying at his heels.

"Let me have that bicycle out, quick," he said to the guard. "You'll see it there. Labelled to Ayr. Here's the ticket."

The guard, who was the same man whom Ross had interviewed previously, stared at Wimsey, and appeared to hesitate.

"It's a' richt, guard," said Macpherson. "I'm a police officer. Let this gentleman have what he wants."

The guard, with a puzzled look, handed out the bicycle, receiving the ticket in exchange. Wimsey pressed a shilling into his hand and hurried with the bicycle along the platform to a point near the station entrance where the end of the bookstall masked him from the view both of the guard and of the booking-clerk. Dalziel, seeing that Macpherson was involved in explanations with the guard, followed

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Wimsey quietly, and was in time to see him moisten the Euston luggage-label with an expansive lick and clap it on to the bicycle over the Ayr label. This done, Wimsey marched briskly out, attaché-case in hand, and plunged down the little side-street and into the public convenience. In less than a minute he was out again, minus spectacles, his cap exchanged for the soft felt hat, and wearing the burberry. Passengers were now dashing through the booking-hall to catch the Glasgow train. Wimsey joined them and purchased a third-class ticket to Glasgow. Dalziel, panting on his heels, purchased four. By the time he had paid for them, Wimsey was gone. The Chief Constable and the Fiscal, waiting near the hoarding at the head of the side-bays, received a cheerful wink from Wimsey as he strolled up and planted the bicycle against the hoarding. They were probably the only people who noticed this manœuvre, for the Pullman Car had by now been attached to the train, and the platform was filled with passengers, porters and luggage. Wimsey, his hands before his face lighting his cigarette, wandered away towards the head of the train. Doors slammed. Dalziel and Macpherson skipped into a compartment. Wimsey followed. The Chief Constable and the Fiscal did likewise. The guard shouted "Right away!" and the train moved out again. The whole business had occupied exactly six minutes.

"There's another good bicycle gone west," said Wimsey.

"No," said Macpherson. "I saw what ye'd be after an' I warned a porter tae send it back to Gatehouse. It belongs tae the constable, and he wad not care tae be wantin' it," he added, thriftily.

"Splendid. I say—it's all gone rather prettily so far, don't you think!"

"Charmingly," said the Fiscal, "but you're not forgetting, Lord Peter, that this train doesn't get into St. Enoch till 2.55,

and that, according to these motor-people—er—Sparkes & Crisp—Mr. Ferguson was in their show-rooms at ten minutes to three?”

“That’s what they say,” replied Wimsey, “but Ferguson didn’t say that. He said ‘About three.’ I fancy, with luck, we may be able to reconcile those two statements.”

“And how about that other ticket you’ve got there?” put in Sir Maxwell. “That’s the thing that’s been worrying me. The ticket from Gatehouse to Glasgow.”

“It doesn’t worry *me*,” said Wimsey, confidently.

“Oh, well,” said the Chief Constable, “if you’re pleased, we’re pleased.”

“I have not enjoyed anything so much for a long time,” said the Fiscal, who seemed quite unable to get over his delight in the excursion. “I ought to be sorry to see the net closing round this poor Mr. Ferguson, but I must admit that I find myself a prey to excitement.”

“Yes—I’m sorry for Ferguson too,” answered Wimsey. “I wish you hadn’t reminded me, sir. But it can’t be helped. I’d be sorrier still if it was Farren, for instance. Poor beggar! This business will tie him by the leg for ever, I’m afraid. Opportunity doesn’t come twice. No; the only thing that’s really worrying me is the possibility of this train’s getting in late.”

The train, however, ran most creditably to time, and drew into St. Enoch at 2.55 to the minute. Wimsey was out of it at once and led his party along the platform at a great pace.

As they passed the entrance to the station hotel, he turned to Sir Maxwell.

“I suggest,” he said, “though I don’t absolutely know, that it was at this point that Ferguson caught sight of Miss Cochran and Miss Selby and their party. They were probably

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just emerging from their lunch, and he guessed that their friends had come along to meet their train at Glasgow."

He broke off to wave frantically to a taxi. The whole five of them crammed into it, and Wimsey directed the driver to set him down in the street where Messrs. Sparkes & Crisp had their show-rooms.

"And drive like blazes," he added.

At five minutes past three he tapped on the glass. The driver pulled up and they all scrambled out on to the pavement. Wimsey paid off the taxi and headed off at a brisk pace for the motor show-rooms a few yards away.

"Don't let's all go in in a bunch," he said. "Come with me, Sir Maxwell, and the others can drift in afterwards."

Messrs. Sparkes & Crisp possessed the usual kind of establishment, filled with tall show-cases exhibiting motoring gadgets. On the right was a counter, where a lad was earnestly discussing with a customer the rival merit of two different brands of shock-absorber. Through an archway appeared a glittering array of motor-cycles and side-cars. A frosted-glass door on the left appeared to lead to an inner office.

Wimsey darted silently in with Sir Maxwell and disappeared behind a show-case. The lad and the customer continued their discussion. After about a minute, Wimsey emerged again and strode wrathfully to the counter.

"See here, sonnie," he said, peremptorily, "do you want to do any business to-day, or don't you? I've got an appointment and I can't wait here all afternoon." He looked at his watch. "I've been hanging about here for the last ten minutes."

"Very sorry, sir. What can I do for you?"

Wimsey brought out his brown-paper parcel from the attaché-case.

"You're agents for these magnetos?"

"Yes, sir. That will be our Mr. Saunders. Excuse me one minute, sir. Call him down, sir."

The youth dashed to the frosted-glass door, leaving Wimsey to endure the furious stare of the specialist in shock-absorbers.

"Will you come this way, sir?"

Wimsey, attaching his party to him with a glance, plunged through the door and was conducted to a small office where "our Mr. Saunders" sat, in company with a typist.

Mr. Saunders was a fresh-faced young man with the Eton-and-Oxford manner. He greeted Wimsey like one welcoming an old school-friend after many years' absence. Then he glanced beyond him to Sergeant Dalziel, and his breezy gusto seemed to suffer a slight diminution.

"Look here, old horse," said Wimsey, "you've seen this magneto before, I fancy?"

Mr. Saunders looked at the magneto and its number rather helplessly, and said:

"Yes, yes, oh, yes, to be sure. Quite, Number XX/47302. Yes. When did we have Number XX/47302 through our hands, Miss Madden?"

Miss Madden referred to a card-index file.

"It came in for repairs a fortnight ago, Mr. Saunders. It belongs to Mr. Ferguson of Gatehouse. He brought it in himself. Defect in armature winding. Returned to him the day before yesterday."

"Yes—exactly. Our fellows at the shops reported a defect in the armature winding. Quite. I hope it is quite O.K. now, Mr.—er——"

"After that," said Wimsey, "you may remember getting a visit from my friend here, Sergeant Dalziel."

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"Oh, absolutely," said Mr. Saunders. "Quite so. You're very well, I hope, Sergeant?"

"You told him then," said Wimsey, "that Mr. Ferguson came in here about ten minutes to three."

"Did I? Oh, yes—I remember. Mr. Crisp called me in. You remember, Miss Madden? Yes. But I didn't say that. Birkett said that—the young man in the show-room, don't you know. Said the customer had been waiting ten minutes. Yes. I didn't see the chappie when he came in, you know. I found him waiting when I got back from lunch. I was a little late that day, I think. Yes. Lunching with a customer. Business, and all that sort of thing. Yes. Mr. Crisp rather hauled me over the coals, I remember. Ha, ha!"

"When exactly *did* ye come in, Mr. Saunders?" asked the Inspector, grimly.

"Oh, well—must have been about three o'clock, I'm afraid. Yes. Half an hour late. Business, of course. Mr. Crisp——"

"Wull ye no speak the truth, mon?" said Inspector Macpherson, irritated.

"Eh? Oh—well—as a matter of fact, I may have been a minute or two later. I—I rather avoided looking at the clock, I'm afraid. What time did I come in, Miss Madden?"

"A quarter past three, Mr. Saunders," said Miss Madden concisely. "I remember the occasion perfectly."

"By Jove, was it? Well, I thought it must have been somewhere about three or a little after. What a memory you've got, Miss Madden."

Miss Madden smiled faintly.

"There you are, Inspector," said Wimsey. "Difference between five minutes to and five minutes past. All the difference, isn't it?"

"Ye may have tae swear tae this in a court of law, Mr. Saunders," said the Inspector, sourly. "So I'll trouble ye no tae forget it again."

"Oh, I say, really?" said Mr. Saunders, in some alarm. "Look here, shall I have to say who I was lunching with? Because, as a matter of fact, it wasn't exactly business. At least, it was private business."

"That will be your own concern, Mr. Saunders. Ye may like tae know that we're investigatin' a case o' murder."

"Oh, I *say*! Of course, I didn't know that. Mr. Crisp just asked me when I came in. I said, about three—because it really was that, you know, more or less. Of course, if I'd known, I should have asked Miss Madden. She has such a wonderful memory for details."

"Ay," said the Inspector, "and I wad advise ye tae cultivate the same yersel'. Gude mornin' tae ye."

The investigators were shown out by Mr. Saunders, who bumbled unconvincingly all down the passage.

"It's not much good questioning this fellow Birkett, I suppose," said Sir Maxwell. "He probably spoke in perfect good faith. He'd be ready to swear to-day that he'd kept you waiting, Wimsey."

"Probably. Well, now, we've got to be up at the Exhibition at four. Not much time. However, I noticed a jobbing printer's on the way up here. I daresay we shall find what we want there."

He led them at a quick pace along the street, and darted into a small printing-works.

"I want to buy a few metal types," he said. "Rather like these. Must be this size, and as near in character as you can supply them." He produced a sheet of paper.

The foreman scratched his head.

"That'll be 5 point," he said. "The nearest thing to it

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wad be Clarendon caps. Ay, we can gi'e ye that, if ye wasn't wantin' a great weight o't."

"Oh, dear, no. I only want five letters—S—M and L—A and D, and a complete set of figures."

"Will monotype castings do ye?"

"I'd rather have foundry-metal if you have it. I want to use them as punches for a small piece of leather-work."

"Verra gude." The foreman went to a case of type, extracted the required letters and figures and wrapped them up in a screw of paper, mentioning a small price.

Wimsey paid for them and put the parcel in his pocket.

"By the way," he said, "did you have a gentleman in here, asking for the same thing, a fortnight ago?"

"No, sir. I wad mind it weel eneugh. Na, na, it wad be a rather uncommon transaction. I havena been askit for sic a thing since I cam' tae this business, an' that's twa year next January."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter. Thanks awfully. Good morning."

"Better get a trade directory, Inspector, and count out all the printers. And—yes—wait—the people who sell book-binding materials. Ferguson must have got these—unless, of course, he brought them with him, which isn't very likely."

Dalziel departed on this errand, while the rest took a taxi and hurried away to the Exhibition, which they reached a few minutes before four. Here they dallied till half-past four, making a hasty tour of all the rooms, and noting one or two striking pictures in each.

"There," said Wimsey, as they passed the turnstile again. "Now, if we were to meet any inquisitive friends on the doorway, we could persuade them that we had visited the whole show and used our brains. And now we had better make tracks for a quiet place. I suggest a hotel bedroom."

CHAPTER XXIX

LORD PETER WIMSEY

IN A REMOTE BEDROOM IN ONE OF GLASGOW'S PRINCIPAL hotels, Wimsey unwrapped his little parcel of types, together with Ferguson's safety-razor, and a small hammer, which he had purchased on the way.

Then, gathering his audience about him, he brought out from his pocket the outward half of his first-class ticket from Gatehouse to Glasgow.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "we come to the crucial point of our investigation.

"If you had read that excellent work of Mr. Connington's, to which I drew your attention, you would have found that it contained an account of how a gentleman forged a clip-mark on his railway ticket, by means of a pair of nail-scissors.

"That was on an English line. Now, the Scottish railway authorities, possibly out of sheer tiresomeness, and possibly with the laudable idea of making the way of the ticket-forgers hard, are not content with a simple triangular clip.

"The other day I travelled—at great inconvenience to myself—from Gatehouse to Glasgow by the 9.8 a. m. train. I found that the brutal ticket-collectors actually inflicted three ferocious punches on my poor little half-ticket. The first was at Maxwelltown, where they produced a horrible set of indented letters and numerals, thus: ^{LMS}_{42D}. At Hurlford, they were content to take a large bite out of the ticket—not a simple triangular snip, but a disgusting thing like a squat

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figure 1. Ferguson would probably often have seen these marks, and having the artist's eye and a remarkable visual memory, would no doubt be able to reproduce these things from memory. Personally, I took the precaution of drawing the mark left by the clipper. Here it is:  Then, at Mauchline, they went all cautious again, and disfigured the ticket with another cipher-code, ^{LMS}_{23A}. Now, gentlemen, with your permission and these instruments, we will proceed to forge the punch-marks on this ticket."

He took up the safety-razor, detached the blade, and, laying the ticket down on the marble-topped washstand, proceeded to cut the Hurlford clip-mark out of the pasteboard.

This done, he laid the ticket on the blotting-pad provided by the hotel, placed the type-metal figure 2 carefully just above the edge of the ticket, and delivered a smart tap with the hammer. The figure appeared, when the type was lifted, sharply incised on the face of the ticket, which, on being turned over, showed a thicker and blunter version of the figure in relief on the reverse.

"Eh, mon!" exclaimed Macpherson, "but ye're ower clever tae be an honest mon."

Wimsey added the figure 3 and an A, taking care to keep the feet of the letters parallel—a task easily accomplished by setting the beard of the type in line with the edge of the pasteboard. Then, with careful attention to spacing and uprightness, he punched in the letters LMS over the 23A. This completed the Mauchline punch-mark. In a third place he forged the ^{LMS}_{42D} for the Maxwelltown mark, and laid his tools aside with a sigh of satisfaction.

"It's a wee bit groggy here and there," he said, "but it would probably pass on a casual inspection. Now, there's only one thing to do, and that is, to get it back into the hands

of the railway-company. I'd better take only one witness to this. We don't want to create a sensation."

The Inspector was chosen to accompany him, and, taking a taxi, they bustled down to St. Enoch Station. Here Wimsey inquired, in a fussy manner, for the collector who had been on duty when the 2.16 came in from Dumfries. The man was pointed out to him at one of the barriers. Wimsey, wreathing his features into a kind of peevish smile, approached him with an air of worried kindness.

"Oh, good evening. I think you were at the barrier when I came in on the 2.16 this afternoon. Now, do you know that you let me get past without giving up my ticket? Yes, yes, he-he! I might have been defrauding the company and all that. I really think you ought to be more careful. Yes. I'm a shareholder on this line, and my cousin is a director, and I *do* think it's dreadfully careless. There'd be an inquiry when they found a ticket short at the audit-office, of course, but, you know, he-he, I could have escaped by that time, couldn't I? Tut, tut—no wonder dividends go down. But I don't want to get you into trouble, my good fellow, so I've brought you the ticket, and if I were you I'd just slip it in with the others and say no more about it. But you'll be more careful in future, won't you?"

During this harangue, which was poured out all in one breath, allowing no time for reply, the ticket-collector's face changed gradually from weary courtesy to astonishment and from astonishment to anger.

"Eh, sir," said the man, the moment he could get a word in edgeways, "I dinna ken what ye'll be up to, but I'll no be had twice that way within the fortnight."

Inspector Macpherson here intervened.

"My mon," said he, "I'm a police officer, an' I'll trouble

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ye tae attend tae me. Have ye had this same thing happen tae ye before? ”

The ticket-collector, now thoroughly alarmed, excused himself, stammered and then let out the whole story.

He had been on duty just about this time exactly a fortnight earlier. A gentleman had come, just as Wimsey had done, and produced a ticket, explaining that he had somehow slipped through the barrier without having to give it up. He (the collector) had examined the ticket, and seen that it had been properly clipped at Maxwelltown, Hurlford and Mauchline, and he had seen no reason to doubt the passenger's story. Not wishing to be reprimanded for negligence, he had thanked the gentleman, taken the ticket and carried it to the clerk who was making up that day's tickets for dispatch to the audit-office. The clerk had obligingly added the ticket to the appropriate bundle, and no more had been heard about it. The collector was sorry, but in view of the fact that the ticket appeared perfectly in order in every way, he had not thought he could be doing any harm. On being shown the photograph of Ferguson, the collector rather tentatively identified him as the passenger who had brought back the ticket.

The clerk confirmed the collector's story, and all that remained was to visit the audit-office and obtain a view of the ticket itself. This, owing to the fact that there had already been one police inquiry about it, was fortunately still in existence. A careful examination showed a slight difference between the form of the lettering and that of the correctly-punched tickets in the same bunch, and also that, whereas the figures purporting to have been punched on it at Mauchline were ^{LMS}_{23A} the other tickets bore the cipher ^{LMS}_{23B}. It was explained that in each case the letter following the numerals denoted the particular collector who clipped the tickets on

that train, each man having his own pair of clippers. The Mauchline numbers ranged from 23A to 23G. Therefore, while in itself the punch-mark ^{LMS}_{23A} was perfectly correct and in order, it was suspicious that collector A should have punched only that one ticket out of all the tickets punched on that train. The previous inquiry had, of course, merely been directed to ascertain that the ticket had actually reached Glasgow, and therefore no special attention was paid to the punch-marks. Now, however, it was evident enough that the punch-marks were forgeries, very neatly executed.

On their return to the hotel, Wimsey and the Inspector were met by Dalziel, with additional confirmation. A man corresponding to Ferguson's description had, on the Tuesday in question, visited a firm that sold book-binders' tools, and purchased a set of letter-punches, similar in character and size to the letter on the tickets. He had explained that he was doing a little amateur book-binding, and wanted the punches for the spines of a set of volumes, which were to be labelled SAMUEL, 1, 2, 3 and 4—this series containing all the letters and numbers necessary for faking the ticket-punches. The case against Ferguson was complete.

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Wimsey was rather silent as they took the last train back from Glasgow.

"You know," he said, "I rather liked Ferguson, and I couldn't stick Campbell at any price. I rather wish ——"

"Can't be helped, Wimsey," said the Chief Constable. "Murder is murder, you know."

"Not always," said Wimsey.

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They came back to find Ferguson under arrest. He had

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endeavoured to take out his car—had found the magneto missing and had then attempted to make a bolt for the railway-station. Ross and Duncan had then thought it time to intervene. He had made no reply when arrested and cautioned, and was then in the Newton-Stewart police-station, awaiting examination. On being confronted with the forged ticket, he gave in, and, despite the warnings of the police, decided to tell his story.

"It wasn't murder," he said. "I swear to God it wasn't murder. And I told you the truth when I said that it didn't happen in the least like your reconstruction.

"Campbell came back at 10.15, just as I said. He barged into my place and began boasting about what he had done to Gowan and what he was going to do to Farren. He had been drinking again after he came in. He used filthy expressions to me and told me he was going to have it out with me, once and for all. He was damnably offensive. I tell you, it wasn't murder. It was Campbell's night to howl, and he got what was coming to him.

"I told him to get out of my house. He wouldn't go, and I tried to push him out. He attacked me, and there was a struggle. I'm stronger than I look, and he wasn't sober. There was a rough and tumble, and I got a heavy punch in on his jaw. He went over and caught his head on the rounded top of the studio stove. When I went to pick him up, he was dead. That was at 11 o'clock.

"Well, I was frightened. I knew I'd often threatened to do him in, and I'd got no witnesses. Here he was, in my house, dead, and I had certainly used force to him first.

"Then I began to think that I might make it look like an accident. I needn't go into the details. You seem to know them all. My plan worked perfectly, with one exception, and I got over that, and as a matter of fact, it did me good. I

meant to start from Barrhill, but I missed the train, and then I hung on to old Ikey-Mo, which made my alibi much better, because it didn't look, on the face of it, as though I could have got to Girvan in time, especially when I'd heard from Jock Graham that you knew I couldn't have started from the Minnoch before 11.30.

"It was bad luck, of course, that the body was found quite so soon. I knew there might be trouble over that *rigor mortis* business. Was that what put you on to the idea of murder in the first place?"

"No," said Wimsey. "It was your habit of putting paints in your pocket. Did you realise that you had carried off Campbell's flake white?"

"I didn't notice it till I got back home. But it never occurred to me that anybody would spot that. I suppose you were the intelligent sleuth, Wimsey. I'd have taken it up to the Minnoch and dropped it somewhere, only that you had seen it the day you came to the studio. That was the first real fright I got. But afterwards I thought I could rely on the alibi. I was rather proud of that ticket-forgery. And I hoped you would overlook the possibilities of Ikey-Mo."

"There's only one thing I don't understand," said the Chief Constable; "why didn't you start out earlier from the Minnoch? There wasn't any need to do such a lot to the painting."

Ferguson smiled faintly.

"That was a big bloomer. You reconstructed the events of the night, and you know what a lot I had to do? Well—I forgot one thing. I forgot to wind up my watch, which I usually do at bedtime. I was going to pack up my painting things, after I'd done a goodish bit, when I heard a lorry coming along. I waited for that to go by and looked at my watch. It said half-past ten. I thought I could easily give it

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another half-hour. I didn't want to hang about at Barhill for fear of being recognised. I estimated another half-hour, and looked at my watch again. It was still half-past ten.

"That put me into a panic. I booted the body over the bank and packed up as though the devil was after me. That must have been how I came to overlook the flake white. I scorched away as fast as I could, but that bicycle I borrowed was too small for me and geared rather low. A beast. I missed the train by a hair's-breadth—it was just moving out of the station as I got to the station turn. I rode on in a kind of desperation—and then that car came along and I thought I was saved. But apparently I wasn't.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to kill Campbell. And I still say, and say again, it was not murder."

Wimsey got up.

"Look here, Ferguson," he said. "I'm damned sorry, and I always thought it couldn't really be murder. Will you forgive me?"

"I'm glad," said Ferguson. "I've felt like hell ever since. I'd really rather stand my trial. I'd like to tell everybody that it wasn't murder. You do believe that, don't you?"

"I do," said Wimsey, "and if the jury are sensible people, they'll bring it in self-defence or justifiable homicide."

The jury, after hearing of Mr. Gowan's experiences, took a view mid-way between murder and self-defence. They brought it in manslaughter, with a strong recommendation to mercy, on the ground that Campbell was undoubtedly looking for trouble, and the beard of Samson was not sacrificed altogether in vain.

THE END

